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THE

MISCELLANEOUS

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PROSE WORKS

OF

SIR WALTER SCOTT, Bart.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. VI.

CHIVALRY, ROMANCE, THE DRAMA.

BOSTON:
WELLS AND LILLY—COURT-STREET.
.....
1829.

19428,5

1860, July 13.

Pickman Bequest

AN

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CHIVALRY, ROMANCE, THE DRAMA.

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WELLS AND LILLY—COURT-STREET.

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AN

ESSAY ON CHIVALRY.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA.

The primitive sense of this well-known word, derived from the French *Chevalier*, signifies merely cavalry, or a body of soldiers serving on horseback; and it has been used in that general acceptation by the best of our poets, ancient and modern, from Milton to Thomas Campbell.

But the present article respects the peculiar meaning given to the word in modern Europe, as applied to the order of knighthood, established in almost all her kingdoms during the middle ages, and the laws, rules, and customs, by which it was governed. Those laws and customs have been long antiquated, but their effects may still be traced in European manners; and, excepting only the change which flowed from the introduction of the Christian religion, we know no cause which has produced such general and permanent difference betwixt the ancients and moderns, as that which has arisen out of the institution of chivalry. In attempting to treat this curious and important subject, rather as philosophers than as antiquaries, we cannot, however, avoid going at some length into the history and origin of the institution.

From the time that cavalry becomes used in war, the horseman who furnishes and supports a charger arises, in all countries, into a person of superior importance to the mere foot soldier. The apparent difficulty of the art of training and managing in the field of battle an animal so spirited and active, gave the ἱππόδαμος Ἕκτορ, or *Domitor equi*, in rude ages, a character of superior gallantry, while the necessary expense attending this mode of service attested his superior wealth. In various military nations, therefore, we find that horsemen are distinguished as an order in the state; and need only appeal to the *equites* of ancient Rome as a body interposed betwixt the senate and the people, or to the laws of the conquerors of New Spain, which assigned a double portion of spoil to the soldier who fought on horseback, in support of a proposition in itself very obvious. But, in the middle ages, the distinction ascribed to soldiers serving on horseback assumed a very peculiar and imposing character. They were not merely respected on account of their wealth or military skill, but were bound together by a union of a very peculiar character, which monarchs were ambitious to share with the poorest of their subjects, and governed by laws directed to enhance, into enthusiasm, the military spirit and the sense of personal honour associated with it. The aspirants to this dignity were not permitted to assume the sacred character of knighthood until after a long and severe probation, during which they practised, as acolytes, the virtues necessary to the order of Chivalry. Knighthood was the goal to which the ambition of every noble youth turned; and to support its honours, which (in theory at least) could only be conferred on the gallant, the modest, and the virtuous, it was necessary he should spend a certain time in a subordinate situation, attendant upon some knight of eminence, observing the conduct of his master, as what must in future be the model of his own, and practising the virtues of humility, modesty, and temperance, until called upon to display those of a higher order.

The general practice, of assigning some precise period when youths should be admitted into the society of the

manhood of their tribe, and considered as entitled to use the privileges of that more mature class, is common to many primitive nations. The custom, also, of marking the transition from the one state to the other, by some peculiar formality or personal ceremonial, seems so very natural, that it is quite unnecessary to multiply instances, or crowd our pages with the barbarous names of the nations by whom it has been adopted. In the general and abstract definition of Chivalry, whether as comprising a body of men whose military service was on horseback, and who were invested with peculiar honours and privileges, or with reference to the mode and period in which these distinctions and privileges were conferred, there is nothing either original or exclusively proper to our Gothic ancestors. It was in the singular tenets of Chivalry,—in the exalted, enthusiastic, and almost sanctimonious, ideas connected with its duties,—in the singular balance which its institutions offered against the evils of the rude ages in which it arose, that we are to seek those peculiarities which render it so worthy of our attention.

The original institution of Chivalry has been often traced to the custom of the German tribes recorded by Tacitus. "All business," says the historian, "whether public or private, is transacted by the citizens under arms. But it is not the custom that any one shall assume the military dress or weapons without the approbation of the state. For this purpose, one of the chief leaders, or the father or nearest relation of the youthful candidate, introduces him into the assembly, and confers on him publicly a buckler and javelin. These arms form the dress proper to manhood, and are the first honour conferred on youth. Before he receives them, the young man is but a member of his own family, but after this ceremony he becomes a part of the state itself." (*Germania* Taciti.) The records of the northern nations, though we cannot rely upon their authenticity with the same unlimited confidence, because we conceive most of the legends relating to them have been written at a much later period than the times in which the scene is laid, may be referred to in confirmation of

the Roman historians. The Scandinavian legends and *Sagas* are full of the deeds of those warriors whom they termed heroes or champions, and who appear to have been formed into an order somewhat resembling that of Chivalry, and certainly followed the principal and most characteristic employment of its profession; wandering from court to court, and from shore to shore, bound on high adventure, and seeking, with equal readiness, their fortunes in love and in war. It would not be difficult to deduce from this very early period some of those peculiar habits and customs, which, brought by the Gothic conquerors into the provinces of the divided empire of Rome, subsisted and became engrafted upon the institutions of Chivalry. Tacitus, for example, informs us, that among the Germans, and especially among the Catti, every youthful champion permitted his beard and hair to grow, and did not shave them until he had performed some signal feat of arms. In the like manner, as the general reader may have learned from that irrefragable authority, Don Quixote de la Mancha, a knight who received his order was obliged to wear white armour, and a shield without a device, until, by some daring and distinguished achievement, he had acquired title to an honourable badge of distinction. If this correspondence of customs shall be thought too far fetched, and too general, the next, which we also derive from Tacitus, is too close to be disputed. The German warriors, who piqued themselves upon their bravery, used, at the commencement of a war, to assume an iron ring, after the fashion of a shackle, upon their arm, which they did not remove until they had slain an enemy. The reader may be pleased to peruse the following instance of a similar custom from the French romance of *Jehan de Saintré*, written in the year 1459, and supposed to be founded, in a great measure, upon real incidents.* The

* We may here observe, once for all, that we have no hesitation in quoting the romances of Chivalry as good evidence of the laws and customs of knighthood. The authors, like the painters of the period, invented nothing, but, copying the manners of the age in which they lived, transferred them, without doubt or scruple, to the period and personages of whom they treated. But the romance of *Jehan de*

hero, with nine companions at arms, four of whom were knights, and five squires, vowed to carry a helmet of a particular shape, that of the knights having a visor of gold, and that of the squires a visor of silver. Thus armed, they were to travel from court to court for the space of three years, defying the like number of knights and squires, wherever they came, to support the beauty of their mistresses with sword and lance. The emblems of their enterprise were chained to their left shoulders, nor could they be delivered of them until their vow was honourably accomplished. Their release took place at the court of the Emperor of Germany, after a solemn tournament, and was celebrated with much triumph. In like manner, in the same romance, a Polish knight, called the Seigneur de Loiselench, is described as appearing at the court of Paris wearing a light gold chain attached to his wrist and ankle in token of a vow, which emblem of bondage he had sworn to wear for five years, until he should find some knight or squire without reproach, by encountering with whom he might be *delivered* (such was the phrase) of his vow and enterprise. Lord Herbert of Cherbury mentions, in his Memoirs, that when he was made Knight of the Bath, a tassel of silken cordage was attached to the mantle of the order, which, doubtless, had originally the same signification as the shackle worn by the German champion. The rule was, however, so far relaxed, that the knot was unloosed so soon as a lady of rank gaged her word that the new Knight of the Bath would do honour to the order; and Lord Herbert, whose punctilious temper set great store by the niceties of chivalrous ceremony, fails not to record, with becoming gratitude, the name of the honourable dame who became his security on this important occasion.

Other instances might be pointed out, in which the ancient customs of the Gothic tribes may be traced in the history of Chivalry; but the above are enough to

Saintré is still more authentic evidence, as it is supposed to contain no small measure of fact, though disguised and distorted. Probably the achievement of the Polish knights may have been a real incident.

19428,5

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promised to those champions who should distinguish themselves in battle against the infidels. And who shall blame the preachers who held such language, when it is remembered that the Saracens had at one time nearly possessed themselves of Aquitaine, and that but for the successful valour of Charles Martel, Pepin, and Charlemagne, the crescent might have dispossessed the cross of the fairest portion of Europe? The fervent sentiments of devotion which direct men's eyes toward heaven, were then justly invoked to unite with those which are most valuable on earth,—the love of our country and its liberties.

But the Romish clergy, who have in all ages possessed the wisdom of serpents, if they sometimes have fallen short of the simplicity of doves, saw the advantage of converting this temporary zeal, which animated the warriors of their creed against the invading infidels, into a permanent union of principles, which should blend the ceremonies of religious worship with the military establishment of the ancient Goths and Germans. The admission of the noble youth to the practice of arms was no longer a mere military ceremony, where the sword or javelin was delivered to him in presence of the prince or elders of his tribe; it became a religious rite, sanctified by the forms of the church which he was in future to defend. The novice had to watch his arms in a church or chapel, or at least on hallowed ground, the night before he had received the honour of knighthood. He was made to assume a white dress, in imitation of the neophytes of the church. Fast and confession were added to vigils; the purification of the bath was imposed on the military acolyte, in imitation of the initiatory rite of Christianity; and he was attended by godfathers, who became security for his performing his military vows, as sponsors had formerly appeared for him at baptism. In all points of ceremonial, the investiture of Chivalry was brought to resemble, as nearly as possible, the administrations of the sacraments of the church. The ceremony itself was performed, where circumstances would admit, in a church or cathedral, and the weapons with which the young warrior was invested were

previously blessed by the priest. The oath of Chivalry bound the knight to defend the rights of the holy church, and to respect religious persons and institutions, and to obey the precepts of the gospel. Nay, more, so intimate was the union betwixt chivalry and religion esteemed to be, that the several gradations of the former were seriously considered as parallel to those of the church, and the knight was supposed to resemble the bishop in rank, duties, and privileges, while the squire and page corresponded to the priest and deacon. At what period this infusion of religious ceremonial into an order purely military first commenced, and when it became complete and perfect, would be a curious but a difficult subject of investigation. Down to the reign of Charlemagne, and somewhat lower, the investiture was of a nature purely civil; but long before the time of the crusades, it had assumed the religious character we have described.

The effect which this union of religious and military zeal was likely to produce in every other case, save that of defensive war, could not but be unfavourable to the purity of the former. The knight, whose profession was war, being solemnly enlisted in the service of the gospel of peace, regarded infidels and heretics of every description as the enemies whom, as God's own soldier, he was called upon to attack and slay wherever he could meet with them, without demanding or waiting for any other cause of quarrel than the difference of religious faith. The duties of morality were indeed formally imposed on him by the oath of his order, as well as that of defending the church, and extirpating heresy and misbelief. But, in all ages, it has been usual for men to compound with their consciences for breaches of the moral code of religion, by a double portion of zeal for its abstract doctrines. In the middle ages, this course might be pursued on system: for the church allowed an exploit done on the infidels as a merit which might obliterate the guilt of the most atrocious crimes.

The genius alike of the age and of the order tended to render the zeal of the professors of Chivalry fierce, burning, and intolerant. "If an infidel, says a great au-

thority, impugn the doctrines of the Christian faith before a churchman, he should reply to him by argument; but a knight should render no other reason to the infidel than six inches of his falchion thrust into his accursed bowels. Even courtesy, and the respect due to ladies of high degree, gave way when they chanced to be infidels. The renowned Sir Bevis of Hamptoun, being invited by the fair Princess Josiane to come to her bower, replies to the Paynims who brought the message,

> "I will ne gou one foot on ground
> For to speke with an heathen hound;
> Unchristian houndes, I rede ye flee,
> Or I your heart's bloode will see."

This intemperate zeal for religion the knights were expected to maintain at every risk, however imminent. Like the early Christians, they were prohibited from acquiescing, even by silence, in the rites of idolatry, although death should be the consequence of their interrupting them. In the fine romance of *Huon of Bourdeaux*, that champion is represented as having failed in duty to God and his faith, because he had professed himself a Saracen for the temporary purpose of obtaining entrance into the palace of the Amial Gaudifer. "And when Sir Huon passed the third gate, he remembered him of the lie he had spoken to obtain entrance into the first. Alas! said the knight, what but destruction can betide one who has so foully falsified and denied his faith towards Him who has done so much for me!" His mode of repentance was truly chivalrous. When he came to the gate of the last interior enclosure of the castle, he said to the warder, "Pagan, accursed be thou of God, open the gate." When he entered the hall where the pagan monarch was seated in full state, he struck off, without ceremony, the head of the pagan lord who sat next in rank to him, exclaiming at the same time with a loud voice, "God, thou hast given me grace well to commence my emprise; may our Redeemer grant me to bring it to an honourable conclusion!" Many such passages might be quoted to show the outrageous nature of the zeal which was supposed to actuate

a Christian knight. But it is needless to ransack works of fiction for this purpose. The real history of the Crusades, founded on the spirit of Chivalry, and on the restless and intolerant zeal which was blended by the churchmen with this military establishment, are an authentic and fatal proof of the same facts. The hair-brained and adventurous character of these enterprises, not less than the promised pardons, indulgencies, and remissions of the church, rendered them dear to the warriors of the middle ages; the idea of re-establishing the Christian religion in the Holy Land, and wresting the tomb of Christ from the infidels, made kings, princes, and nobles, blind to its hazards; and they rushed, army after army, to Palestine, in the true spirit of Chivalry, whose faithful professors felt themselves the rather called upon to undertake an adventure, from the peculiar dangers which surrounded it, and the numbers who had fallen in previous attempts.

It was after the conquest of the Holy Land that the union between temporal and spiritual Chivalry (for such was the term sometimes given to monastic establishments) became perfect, by the institution of the two celebrated military orders of monks, the Knights Templars and Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, who, renouncing (at least in terms) the pomp, power, and pleasures of the world, and taking upon themselves the monastic vows of celibacy, purity, and obedience, did not cease to remain soldiers, and directed their whole energy against the Saracens. The history of these orders will be found in its proper place in this work; but their existence is here noticed as illustrating our general proposition concerning the union of devotion and chivalry. A few general remarks will close this part of the subject.

The obvious danger of teaching a military body to consider themselves as missionaries of religion, and bound to spread its doctrines, is, that they are sure to employ in its service their swords and lances. The end is held to sanctify the means, and the slaughter of thousands of infidels is regarded as an indifferent, or rather as a meritorious action, providing it may occasion

the conversion of the remnant, or the peopling their land with professors of a purer faith. The wars of Charlemagne in Saxony, the massacres of the Albigenses in the south of France, the long-continued wars of Palestine, all served to illustrate the dangers resulting from the doctrine, which inculcated religion not as a check upon the horrors and crimes of war, but as itself its most proper and legitimate cause. The evil may be said to have survived the decay of Chivalry, to have extended itself to the New World, and to have occasioned those horrors with which it was devastated for ages after its first discovery. The Spanish conquerors of South America were not, indeed, knights-errant, but the nature of their enterprises, as well as the mode in which they were conducted, partook deeply of the spirit of Chivalry. In no country of Europe had this spirit sunk so deeply and spread so wide as in Spain. The extravagant positions respecting the point of honour, and the romantic summons which Chivalry proclaimed to deeds of danger and glory, suited the ardent and somewhat oriental character of the Spaniards, a people more remarkable for force of imagination, and depth of feeling, than for wit or understanding. Chivalry, in Spain, was embittered by a double proportion of intolerant bigotry, owing to their constant and inveterate wars with the Moorish invaders. The strain of sentiment, therefore, which Chivalry inspired, continued for a long time to mark the manners of Spain after the decay of its positive institutions, as the beams of the sun tinge the horizon after the setting of its orb. The warriors whom she sent to the New World sought and found marvels which resembled those of romance; they achieved deeds of valour against such odds of numbers as are only recorded in the annals of knight-errantry; and, alas! they followed their prototypes in that indifference for human life, which is the usual companion of intolerant zeal. Avarice, indeed, brought her more sordid shades to complete the gloomy picture; and avarice was unknown to the institutions of Chivalry. The same intolerance, however, which overthrew the altars of the Indians by violence, instead of assailing

their errors by reason, and which imputed to them as crimes their ignorance of a religion which had never been preached to them, and their rejection of speculative doctrines of faith propounded by persons whose practice was so ill calculated to recommend them—all these may be traced to the spirit of Chivalry, and the military devotion of its professors.

The religion of the knights, like that of the times, was debased by superstition. Each champion had his favourite saint, to whom he addressed himself upon special occasions of danger, and to whom, after the influence of his lady's eyes, he was wont to ascribe the honour of his conquest. St. Michael, the leader of banded Seraphim, and the personal antagonist of Satan,—St. George, St. James, and St. Martin, all of whom popular faith had invested with the honours of Chivalry,—were frequently selected as the appropriate champions of the militant adventurers yet on earth. The knights used their names adjected to their own, as their insignia, watch-word, or signal for battle. Edward III., fighting valiantly in a night skirmish before the gates of Calais, was heard to accompany each blow he struck with the invocation of his tutelar saints, Ha! Saint Edward! ha! St. George! But the Virgin Mary, to whom their superstition ascribed the qualities of youth, beauty, and sweetness, which they prized in their terrestrial mistresses, was an especial object of the devotion of the followers of Chivalry, as of all other good Catholics. Tournaments were undertaken, and feats of arms performed in her honour, as in that of an earthly mistress; and the veneration with which she was regarded seems occasionally to have partaken of the character of romantic affection. She was often held to return this love by singular marks of her favour and protection. During an expedition of the Christians to the coast of Africa, Froissart informs us that a large black dog was frequently seen in their camp, which barked furiously whenever the infidels approached it by night, and rendered such service to the Christian adventurers by its vigilance, that with one consent they named it "The Dog of Our Lady."

But although, as is incidental to human institutions, the mixture of devotion in the military character of the knight degenerated into brutal intolerance and superstition in its practical effects, nothing could be more beautiful and praiseworthy than the theory on which it was grounded. That the soldier drawing the sword in defence of his country and its liberties, or of the oppressed innocence of damsels, widows, and orphans, or in support of religious rights, for which those to whom they belonged were disqualified by their profession to combat in person,—that he should blend with all the feelings which these offices inspired, a deep sense of devotion, exalting him above the advantage and even the fame which he himself might derive from victory, and giving dignity to defeat itself, as a lesson of divine chastisement and humiliation; that the knight on whose valour his countrymen were to rely in danger should set them an example in observing the duties and precepts of religion,—are circumstances so well qualified to soften, to dignify, and to grace the profession of arms, that we cannot but regret their tendency to degenerate into a ferocious propensity to bigotry, persecution, and intolerance. Such, however, is the fate of all human institutions, which, however fairly framed in theory, are in practice too often corrupted by our evil passions, until the results which flow from them become the very reverse of what was to have been expected and desired.

The next ingredient in the spirit of Chivalry, second in force only to the religious zeal of its professors, and frequently predominating over it, was a devotion to the female sex, and particularly to her whom each knight selected as the chief object of his affection, of a nature so extravagant and unbounded as to approach to a sort of idolatry.

The original source of this sentiment is to be found, like that of Chivalry itself, in the customs and habits of the northern tribes, who possessed, even in their rudest state, so many honourable and manly distinctions, over all the other nations in the same stage of society. The chaste and temperate habits of these youth, and the opinion that it was dishonourable to hold sexual inter-

course until the twentieth year was attained, was in the highest degree favourable not only to the morals and health of the ancient Germans, but must have contributed greatly to place their females in that dignified and respectable rank which they held in society. Nothing tends so much to blunt the feelings, to harden the heart, and to destroy the imagination, as the worship of the Vaga Venus in early youth. Wherever women have been considered as the early, willing, and accommodating slaves of the voluptuousness of the other sex, their character has become degraded, and they have sunk into domestic drudges and bondswomen among the poor,—the captives of a haram among the more wealthy. On the other hand, the men, easily and early cloyed with indulgences, which soon lose their poignancy when the senses only are interested, become first indifferent, then harsh and brutal, to the unfortunate slaves of their pleasures. The sated lover,—and perhaps it is the most brutal part of humanity,—is soon converted into the capricious tyrant, like the successful seducer of the modern poet.

> "Hard! with their fears and terrors to behold
> The cause of all, the faithless lover cold,
> Impatient grown at every wish denied,
> And barely civil, soothed and gratified."
>
> CRABBE's *Borough*, *p.* 213.

Habitual indulgence seeks change of objects to relieve satiety. Hence polygamy, and all its brutalizing consequences, which were happily unknown to our Gothic ancestors. The virtuous and manly restraints imposed on their youth were highly calculated to exalt the character of both sexes, and especially to raise the females in their own eyes and those of their lovers. They were led to regard themselves, not as the passive slaves of pleasure, but as the objects of a prolonged and respectful affection, which could only be finally gratified when their lovers had attained the age of mature reason, and were capable to govern and to defend the family which should arise around them. With the young man imagination and sentiment combined to heighten

his ideas of a pleasure which nature instructed him to seek, and which the wise laws of his country prevented him from prematurely aspiring to share. To a youth so situated, the maiden on whom he placed his affections became an object of awe as well as of affection; the passion which he indulged for her was of a nature as timid and pure as engrossing and powerful; the minds of the parties became united before the joining of their hands, and a moral union preceded the mere intercourse of the sexes.

The marriages formed under these wise auspices were, in general, happy and affectionate. Adultery was infrequent, and punished with the utmost rigour; nor could she who had undergone the penalty of such a crime find a second husband, however distinguished by beauty, birth, or wealth. (Taciti *Germania.*) The awe and devotion with which the lover had regarded his destined bride during the years in which the German youth were enjoined celibacy, became regard and affection in the husband towards the sharer of his labours and the mistress of his household. The matron maintained that rank in society which love had assigned to the maiden. No one then, says the Roman historian, dared to ridicule the sacred union of marriage, or to term an infringement of its laws a compliance with the manners of the age. The German wife, once married, seldom endeavoured to form a second union, but continued, in honoured widowhood, to direct and manage the family of her deceased husband. This habitual subjection of sensuality to sentiment, these plain, simple, virtuous, and temperate manners of the German women, placed the females in that high rank of society which the sex occupies when its conduct is estimable, and from which it as certainly declines in ages or climates prone to luxurious indulgence. The superintendance of the domestic affairs was assigned to the German women, a duty in which the men seldom interfered, unless when rendered by age or wounds incapable of warfare. They were capable of exercising the supreme authority in their tribe, and of holding the honours of the priesthood. But the influence of the

women in a German tribe, as well as their duties in war, will be best understood from the words of Tacitus. "It is the principal incitement to the courage of the Germans, that in battle their separate troops or columns are not arranged promiscuously as chance directs, but consist each of a united family, or clan, with its relatives. Their most precious pledges are placed in the vicinity whence may be heard the cries of their females, the wailings of their infants, whom each accounts the most sacred witnesses and the dearest eulogists of his valour. The wounded repair to their mothers and spouses, who hesitate not to number their wounds, and to suck the blood that flows from them. The females carry refreshment to those engaged in the contest, and encourage them by their exhortations. It is related, that armies, when disordered, and about to give way, have renewed the contest, at the instance of the women; moved by the earnestness of their entreaties, their exposed bosoms, and the danger of approaching captivity; —a doom which they dread more on account of their females than even on their own;—insomuch, that these German estates are most effectually bound to obedience, among the number of whose hostages there are noble damsels as well as men. They deem, indeed, that there resides in the female sex something sacred and capable of presaging the future; nor do they scorn their advice or neglect their responses. In the time of Vespasian we have seen Velleda long hold the rank of a deity in most of the German states; and, in former times, they venerated Aurinia and other females; neither, however, from mere flattery, nor yet in the character of actual goddesses."

The tales and *Sagas* of the north, in which females often act the most distinguished part, might also be quoted as proofs of the rank which they held in society. We find them separating the most desperate frays by their presence, their commands, or their mantles, which they threw over the levelled weapons of the combatants. Nor were their rights less extensive than their authority. In the *Eyrbiggia Saga* we are informed, that Thordisa, the mother of the celebrated Pontiff

Snorro, and wife of Biarko of Helgafels, received a blow from her husband. The provocation was strong, for the matron had, in the husband's house and at his table, attempted to stab his guest Eyalf Grafe, on account of his having slain one of her relations. Yet so little did this provocation justify the offence, that, in the presence of the comitia, or public assembly of the tribe, Thordisa invoked witnesses to bear testimony, that she divorced her husband on account of his having raised his hand against her person. And such were the rights of a northern *mater familias*, that the divorce and a division of goods immediately took place between the husband and wife, although the violence of which Thordisa complained was occasioned by her own attempt to murder a guest.

We have traced the ideas of the Gothic tribes on this important point the more at length, because they show, that the character of veneration, sanctity, and inviolability, attached to the female character, together with the important part assigned to them in society, were brought with them from their native forests, and had existence long before the chivalrous institutions in which they made so remarkable a feature. They easily became amalgamated in a system so well fitted to adopt whatever was romantic and enthusiastic in manners or sentiment. Amid the various duties of knighthood, that of protecting the female sex, respecting their persons, and redressing their wrongs, becoming the champion of their cause, and the chastiser of those by whom they were injured, was represented as one of the principal objects of the institution. Their oath bound the new-made knights to defend the cause of all women without exception; and the most pressing way of conjuring them to grant a boon was to implore it in the name of God and the ladies. The cause of a distressed lady was, in many instances, preferable to that even of the country to which the knight belonged. Thus, the Captal de Buche, though an English subject, did not hesitate to unite his troops with those of the Compte de Foix, to relieve the ladies in a French town, where they were besieged and threatened with violence by

the insurgent peasantry. The looks, the words, the sign of a lady, were accounted to make knights at time of need perform double their usual deeds of strength and valour. At tournaments and in combats, the voices of the ladies were heard like those of the German females in former battles, calling on the knights to remember their fame, and exert themselves to the uttermost. "Think, gentle knights," was their cry, "upon the wool of your breasts, the nerve of your arms, the love you cherish in your hearts, and do valiantly, for ladies behold you." The corresponding shouts of the combatants were, "Love of ladies! Death of warriors! On, valiant knights, for you fight under fair eyes."

Where the honour or love of a lady was at stake, the fairest prize was held out to the victorious knight, and champions from every quarter were sure to hasten to combat in a cause so popular. Chaucer, when he describes the assembly of the knights who came with Arcite and Palemon to fight for the love of the fair Emilie, describes the manners of his age in the following lines.

"For every knight that loved chivalry,
And would his thankes have a passant name,
Hath pray'd that he might ben of that game,
And well was him that thereto chusen was.
For if there fell to-morrow such a case,
Ye knowen well that every lusty knight
That loveth par amour, and hath his might,
Were it in Engellonde, or elleswhere,
They wold hir thankes willen to be there.
To fight for a lady! Ah! Benedicite,
It were a lusty sight for to see."

It is needless to multiply quotations on a subject so trite and well known. The defence of the female sex in general, the regard due to their honour, the subservience paid to their commands, the reverent awe and courtesy, which, in their presence, forbear all unseemly words and actions, were so blended with the institution of Chivalry, as to form its very essence.

But it was not enough that the "very perfect, gentle knight," should reverence the fair sex in general. It was essential to his character that he should select, as

his proper choice, "a lady and a love," to be the polar star of his thoughts, the mistress of his affections, and the directress of his actions. In her service, he was to observe the duties of loyalty, faith, secrecy, and reverence. Without such an empress of his heart, a knight, in the phrase of the times, was a ship without a rudder, a horse without a bridle, a sword without a hilt; a being, in short, devoid of that ruling guidance and intelligence, which ought to inspire his bravery, and direct his actions.

The Dame des Belles Cousines, having cast her eyes upon the little Jean de Saintré, then a page of honour at court, demanded of him the name of his mistress and his love, on whom his affections were fixed. The poor boy, thus pressed, replied, that the first object of his love was the lady his mother, and the next his sister Jacqueline. "Jouvencel," replied the inquisitive lady, who had her own reasons for not being contented with this simple answer, "we do not now talk of the affection due to your mother and sister; I desire to know the name of the lady whom you love *par amours*." "In faith, madam," said the poor page, to whom the mysteries of chivalry, as well as of love, were yet unknown, "I love no one *par amours*."—"Ah, false gentleman, and traitor to the laws of chivalry," returned the lady, "dare you say that you love no lady? well may we perceive your falsehood and craven spirit by such an avowal. Whence were derived the great valour and the high achievements of Lancelot, of Gawain, of Tristrem, of Giron the Courteous, and of other heroes of the Round Table,—whence those of Panthus, and of so many other valiant knights and squires of this realm, whose names I could enumerate had I time,—whence the exaltation of many whom I myself have known to arise to high dignity and renown, except from their animating desire to maintain themselves in the grace and favour of their ladies, without which mainspring to exertion and valour, they must have remained unknown and insignificant? And do you, coward page, now dare to aver, that you have no lady, and desire to have none? Hence, false heart that thou art."

To avoid these bitter reproaches, the simple page named as his lady and love, *par amours*, Matheline de Coucy, a child of ten years old. The answer of the Dame des Belles Cousines, after she had indulged in the mirth which his answer prompted, instructed him how to place his affections more advantageously; and as the former part of the quotation may show the reader how essential it was to the profession of chivalry, that every one of its professors should elect a lady of his affections, that which follows explains the principles on which his choice should be regulated. "Matheline," said the lady, "is indeed a pretty girl, and of high rank, and better lineage than appertains to you. But what good, what profit, what honour, what advantage, what comfort, what aid, what council for advancing you in the ranks of chivalry, can you derive from such a choice? Sir, you ought to choose a lady of high and noble blood, who has the talent and means to counsel and aid you at your need, and her you ought to serve so truly, and love so loyally, that she must be compelled to acknowledge the true and honourable affection which you bear to her. For believe there is no lady, however cruel and haughty, but through length of faithful service will be brought to acknowledge and reward loyal affection with some portion of pity, compassion, or mercy. In this manner, you will attain the praise of a worthy knight; and till you follow such a course, I would not give an apple for you or your achievements." The lady then proceeds to lecture the acolyte of Chivalry at considerable length on the seven mortal sins, and the way in which the true amorous knight may eschew commission of them. Still, however, the saving grace inculcated in her sermon was fidelity and secrecy in the service of the mistress whom he should love *par amours*. She proves, by the aid of quotations from the Scripture, the fathers of the church, and the ancient philosophers, that the true and faithful lover can never fall into the crimes of Pride, Anger, Envy, Sloth, or Gluttony. From each of these his true faith is held to warrant and defend him. Nay, so pure was the nature of the flame which she recom-

mended, that she maintained it to be inconsistent even with the seventh sin of Chambering and Wantonness, to which it might seem too nearly allied. The least dishonest thought or action was, according to her doctrine, sufficient to forfeit the chivalrous lover the favour of his lady. It seems, however, that the greater part of her charge concerning incontinence is levelled against such as haunted the receptacles of open vice; and that she reserved an exception (of which, in the course of the history, she made liberal use) in favour of the intercourse which, in all love, honour, and secrecy, might take place, when the favoured and faithful knight had obtained, by long service, the boon of amorous mercy from the lady whom he loved *par amours*. The last encouragement which the Dames des Belles Cousines held out to Saintré, in order to excite his ambition, and induce him to fix his passion upon a lady of elevated birth, rank, and sentiment, is also worthy of being quoted, since it shows that it was the prerogative of Chivalry to abrogate the distinctions of rank, and elevate the hopes of the knight, whose sole patrimony was his arms and valour, to the high-born and princely dame, before whom he carved as a sewer.

"How is it possible for me," replied poor Saintré, after having heard out the unmercifully long lecture of the Dame des Belles Cousines, "to find a lady, such as you describe, who will accept of my service, and requite the affection of such a one as I am?"—"And why should you not find her?" answered the lady preceptress. "Are you not gently-born? Are you not a fair and proper youth? Have you not eyes to look on her—ears to hear her—a tongue to plead your cause to her—hands to serve her—feet to move at her bidding—body and heart to accomplish loyally her commands? And, having all these, can you doubt to adventure yourself in the service of any lady whatsoever?"

In these extracts are painted the actual manners of the age of Chivalry. The necessity of the perfect knight having a mistress, whom he loved *par amours*, the duty of dedicating his time to obey her commands, however capricious, and his strength to execute extra-

vagant feats of valour, which might redound to her praise,—for all that was done for her sake, and under her auspices, was counted her merit, as the victories of their generals were ascribed to the Roman Emperors, —was not a whit less necessary to complete the character of a good knight than the Dame des Belles Cousines represented it.

It was the especial pride of each distinguished champion, to maintain, against all others, the superior worth, beauty, and accomplishments of his lady; to bear her picture from court to court, and support, with lance and sword, her superiority to all other dames, abroad or at home. To break a spear for the love of their ladies, was a challenge courteously given, and gently accepted, among all true followers of Chivalry; and history and romance are alike filled with the tilts and tournaments which took place upon this argument, which was ever ready and ever acceptable. Indeed, whatever the subject of the tournament had been, the lists were never closed until a solemn course had been made in honour of the ladies.

There were knights yet more adventurous, who sought to distinguish themselves by singular and uncommon feats of arms in honour of their mistresses; and such was usually the cause of the whimsical and extravagant vows of arms which we have subsequently to notice. To combat against extravagant odds, to fight amid the press of armed knights without some essential part of their armour, to do some deed of audacious valour in face of friend and foe, were the services by which the knights strove to recommend themselves, or which their mistresses (very justly so called) imposed on them as proofs of their affection.

On such occasions, the favoured knight, as he wore the colours and badge of the lady of his affections, usually exerted his ingenuity in inventing some device or cognisance which might express their love, either openly, as boasting of it in the eye of the world, or in such mysterious mode of indication as should only be understood by the beloved person, if circumstances did not permit an avowal of his passion. Among the earli-

est instances of the use of the English language at the court of the Norman monarchs, is the distich painted in the shield of Edward III. under the figure of a white swan, being the device which that warlike monarch wore at a tourney, at Windsor.

"Ha! ha! the white swan,
By God his soul, I am thy man."

The choice of these devices was a very serious matter; and the usurpation of such as any knight had previously used and adopted, was often the foundation of a regular quarrel, of which many instances occur in Froissart and other writers.

The ladies, bound as they were in honour to requite the passion of their knights, were wont, on such occasions, to dignify them by the present of a scarf, ribbon, or glove, which was to be worn in the press of battle and tournament. These marks of favour they displayed on their helmets, and they were accounted the best incentives to deeds of valour. The custom appears to have prevailed in France to a late period, though polluted with the grossness so often mixed with the affected refinement and gallantry of that nation. In the attack made by the Duke of Buckingham upon the Isle of Rhé, favours were found on the persons of many of the French soldiers who fell at the skirmish on the landing; but for the manner in which they were disposed, we are compelled to refer to Howel and Wilson.

Sometimes the ladies, in conferring these tokens of their favour, clogged them with the most extravagant and severe conditions. But the lover had this advantage in such cases, that if he ventured to encounter the hazard imposed, and chanced to survive it, he had, according to the fashion of the age, the right of exacting, from the lady, favours corresponding in importance. The annals of Chivalry abound with stories of cruel and cold fair ones, who subjected their lovers to extremes of danger, in hopes that they might get rid of their addresses, but were, upon their unexpected

success, caught in their own snare, and, as ladies who would not have their name made the theme of reproach by every minstrel, compelled to recompense the deeds which their champion had achieved in their name. There are instances in which the lover used his right of reprisals with some rigour, as in the well-known *fabliau* of the three knights and the shift; in which a lady proposes to her three lovers, successively, the task of entering, unarmed, into the melée of a tournament, arrayed only in one of her shifts. The perilous proposal is declined by two of the knights and accepted by the third, who thrusts himself, in the unprotected state required, into all the hazards of the tournament, sustains many wounds, and carries off the prize of the day. On the next day the husband of the lady (for she was married) was to give a superb banquet to the knights and nobles who had attended the tourney. The wounded victor sends the shift back to its owner, with his request, that she would wear it over her rich dress on this solemn occasion, soiled and torn as it was, and stained all over with the blood of its late wearer. The lady did not hesitate to comply, declaring, that she regarded this shift, stained with the blood of her "fair friend, as more precious than if it were of the most costly materials." Jaques de Basin, the minstrel, who relates this curious tale, is at a loss to say whether the palm of true love should be given to the knight or to the lady on this remarkable occasion. The husband, he assures us, had the good sense to seem to perceive nothing uncommon in the singular vestment with which his lady was attired, and the rest of the good company highly admired her courageous requital of the knight's gallantry.

Sometimes the patience of the lover was worn out by the cold-hearted vanity which thrust him on such perilous enterprises. At the court of one of the German emperors, while some ladies and gallants of the court were looking into a den where two lions were confined, one of them purposely let her glove fall within the palisade which enclosed the animals, and commanded her lover, as a true knight, to fetch it out to

her. He did not hesitate to obey, jumped over the enclosure; threw his mantle towards the animals as they sprung at him; snatched up the glove, and regained the outside of the palisade. But when in safety, he proclaimed aloud, that what he had achieved was done for the sake of his own reputation, and not for that of a false lady, who could, for her sport and cold-blooded vanity, force a brave man on a duel so desperate. And, with the applause of all that were present, he renounced her love for ever.

This, however, was an uncommon circumstance. In general, the lady was supposed to have her lover's character as much at heart as her own, and to mean by pushing him upon enterprises of hazard, only to give him an opportunity of meriting her good graces, which she could not with honour confer upon one undistinguished by deeds of chivalry. An affecting instance is given by Godscroft.

At the time when the Scotch were struggling to recover their country from the usurpation of Edward I., the Castle of Douglas was repeatedly garrisoned by the English, and these garrisons were as frequently surprised, and cut to pieces, by the good Lord James of Douglas, who, lying in the mountainous wilds of Cairntable, and favoured by the intelligence which he maintained among his vassals, took opportunity of the slightest relaxation of vigilance to surprise the fortress. At length, a fair dame of England announced to the numerous suitors who sought her hand, that she would confer it on the man who should keep the perilous Castle of Douglas (so it was called) for a year and a day. The knight who undertook this dangerous task at her request, discharged his duty like a careful soldier for several months, and the lady, relenting at the prospect of his continued absence, sent a letter to recall him, declaring she held his probation as accomplished. In the meantime, however, he had received a defiance from Douglas, threatening him, that, let him use his utmost vigilance, he would recover from him his father's castle before Palm-Sunday. The English knight deemed that he could not in honour leave the castle till

this day was past; and on the very eve of Palm-Sunday was surprised and slain with his lady's letter in his pocket, the perusal whereof greatly grieved the good Lord James of Douglas.

We are left much to our own conjectures on the appearance and manners of these haughty beauties, who were wooed with sword and lance, whose favours were bought at the expense of such dear and desperate perils, and who were worshipped, like heathen deities, with human sacrifices. The character of the ladies of the ages of Chivalry was probably determined by that of the men, to whom it sometimes approached. Most of these heroines were educated to understand the treatment of wounds, not only of the heart, but of the sword; and in romance, at least, the quality of leechcraft (practised by the Lady Bountifuls of the last generation) was essential to the character of an accomplished princess. They sometimes trespassed on the province of their lovers, and actually took up arms. The Countess de Montfort in Bretagne is celebrated by Froissart for the gallantry with which she defended her castle, when besieged by the English; and the old Prior of Lochleven in Scotland is equally diffuse in the praise of Black Agnes, Countess of March, who, in the reign of Edward III., held out the castle of Dunbar against the English. She appeared on the battlements with a white handkerchief in her hands, and wiped the walls in derision where they had been struck by stones from the English engines. When Montagu, Earl of Salisbury, brought up to the walls a military engine, like the Roman *testudo*, called a sow, she exclaimed in rhyme,

> Beware, Montagou,
> For farrow shall thy sow.

A huge rock discharged from the battlements dashed the sow to pieces, and the English soldiers who escaped from its ruins were called by the Countess, in derision, Montagu's pigs.

The nature of the conferences between these high-

minded heroines and their lovers, was somewhat peculiar. Their delectations were in tales of warlike exploits, and in discourse of hunting and hawking. But when these topics were exhausted, they found in metaphysical discussions of nice questions concerning the passion of love, an endless source of interesting disquisition. The idea and definition of a true and pure passion, illustrated by a hundred imaginary cases devised on purpose, were managed in the same manner in which the schoolmen of the day agitated their points of metaphysical theology. The Scotists and the Thomists, whose useless and nonsensical debates cumbered the world with so many volumes of absurd disquisition upon the most extravagant points of polemical divinity, saw their theological labours rivalled in the courts of love, where the most abstracted reasoning was employed in discussing subtle questions upon the exaggerated hopes, fears, doubts, and suspicions of lovers, the circumstances of whose supposed cases were often ridiculous, sometimes criminal, sometimes licentious, and almost always puerile and extravagant. It is sufficient to state, that the discussions in the Courts of Love regarded such important and interesting questions, as, Whether his love be most meritorious who has formed his passion entirely on hearing, or his who has actually seen his mistress? with others of a tendency equally edifying.

Extremes of every kind border on each other; and as the devotion of the knights of Chivalry degenerated into superstition, the Platonic refinements and subtleties of amorous passion which they professed, were sometimes compatible with very coarse and gross debauchery. We have seen that they derived from the Gothic tribes that high and reverential devotion to the female sex, which forms the strongest tint in the manners of Chivalry. But with the simplicity of those ancient times they lost their innocence; and woman, though still worshipped with enthusiasm as in the German forests, did not continue to be (in all cases at least) the same pure object of regard. The marriage-tie ceased to be respected; and, as the youthful knights

had seldom the means or inclination to encumber themselves with wives and families, their lady-love was often chosen among the married ladies of the court. It is true, that such a connexion was supposed to be consistent with all respect and honour, and was regarded by the world, and sometimes by the husband, as a high strain of Platonic sentiment, through which the character of its object in no respect suffered. But nature vindicated herself for the violence offered to her; and while the metaphysical students and pleaders in the Courts of Love professed to aspire but to the lip or hand of their ladies, and to make a merit of renouncing all further intrusion on their bounties, they privately indulged themselves in amours which had very little either of delicacy or sentiment. In the romance of the *Petit Jehan de Saintré*, that self-same Lady des Belles Cousines, who lectures so learnedly upon the seven mortal sins, not only confers on her deserving lover "le don d'amoureux merci," but enters into a very unworthy and disgraceful intrigue with a stout broad-shouldered abbot, into which no sentiment whatever can be supposed to enter. The romance of *Tirante the White*, praised by Cervantes as a faithful picture of the knights and ladies of his age, seems to have been written in an actual brothel, and contrasted with others, may lead us to suspect that their purity is that of romance, their profligacy that of reality. This license was greatly increased by the Crusades, from which the survivors of these wild expeditions brought back the corrupted morals of the east, to avenge the injuries they had inflicted on its inhabitants. Joinville has informed us of the complaints which Saint Louis made to him in confidence of the debaucheries practised in his own royal tent, by his attendants, in this holy expedition. And the ignominious punishment to which he subjected a knight, detected in such excesses, shows what severe remedies he judged necessary to stem the increase of libertinism.

Indeed, the gross license which was practised during the middle ages, may be well estimated by the vulgar and obscene language that was currently used in tales

and fictions addressed to the young and noble of both sexes. In the romance of the *Round Table*, as Ascham sternly states, little was to be learned but examples of homicide and adultery, although he had himself seen it admitted to the anti-chamber of princes, when it was held a crime but to be possessed of the Word of God. In the romance of *Amadis de Gaul*, and many others, the heroines, without censure or imputation, confer on their lovers the rights of a husband before the ceremony of the church gave them a title to the name. These are serious narrations, in which decorum, at least, is rarely violated. But the comic tales are of a far more indelicate cast.

The *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer contain many narratives, of which, not only the diction, but the whole turn of the narrative, is extremely gross. Yet it does not seem to have occurred to the author, a man of rank and fashion, that they were improper to be recited, either in the presence of the Prioress and her votaries, or in that of the noble Knight who

> ——— of his port was meek as is a maid,
> And never yet no villainy he said.

And he makes but a light apology for including the disasters of the *Millar of Trompington*, or of *Absalom the Gentle Clerk*, in the same series of narrations with the *Knight's Tale*. Many of Bandello's most profligate novels are expressly dedicated to females of rank and consideration. And, to conclude, the *Fabliaux*, published by Barbazan and Le Grand, are frequently as revolting, from their naked grossness, as interesting from the lively pictures which they present of life and manners. Yet these were the chosen literary pastimes of the fair and the gay, during the times of Chivalry, and listened to, we cannot but suppose, with an interest considerably superior to that exhibited by the yawning audience who heard the theses of the Courts of Love attacked and supported in logical form, and with metaphysical subtlety.

Should the manners of the times appear inconsistent

in these respects which we have noticed, we must remember that we are ourselves variable and inconsistent animals, and that, perhaps, the surest mode of introducing and encouraging any particular vice, is to rank the corresponding virtue at a pitch unnatural in itself, and beyond the ordinary attainment of humanity. The vows of celibacy introduced profligacy among the Catholic clergy, as the high-flown and overstrained Platonism of the professors of Chivalry favoured the increase of license and debauchery.

After the love of God and of his lady, the preux chevalier was to be guided by that of glory and renown. He was bound by his vow to seek out adventures of risk and peril, and never to abstain from the quest which he might undertake, for any unexpected odds of opposition which he might encounter. It was not indeed the sober and regulated exercise of valour, but its fanaticism, which the genius of Chivalry demanded of its followers. Enterprises the most extravagant in conception, the most difficult in execution, the most useless when achieved, were those by which an adventurous knight chose to distinguish himself. There were solemn occasions also, on which these displays of chivalrous enthusiasm were specially expected and called for. It is only sufficient to name the tournaments, single combats, and solemn banquets, at which vows of chivalry were usually formed and proclaimed.

The tournaments were uniformly performed and frequented by the choicest and noblest youth in Europe, until the fatal accident of Henry II., after which they fell gradually into disuse. It was in vain that, from the various dangers to which they gave rise, these perilous amusements were prohibited by the heads of the Christian church. The Popes, infallible as they were deemed, might direct, but could not curb, the military spirit of Chivalry; they could excite crusades, but they could not abolish tournaments. Their laws, customs, and regulations, will fall properly under a separate article. It is here sufficient to observe, that these military games were of two kinds. In the most ancient, meaning "nothing in hate, but all in honour," the adventurous

knights fought with sharp blades and lances, as in the day of battle. Even then, however, the number of blows was usually regulated, or, in cases of a general combat, some rules were laid down to prevent too much slaughter. The regulations of Duke Theseus for the tournament in Athens, as narrated by Chaucer in the *Knight's Tale*, may give a good example of these restrictions. When the combatants fought on foot, it was prohibited to strike otherwise than at the head or body; the number of strokes to be dealt with the sword and battle-axe were carefully numbered and limited, as well as the careers to be run with the lance. In these circumstances alone, the combats at *outrance*, as they were called, differed from encounters in actual war.

In process of time, the dangers of the solemn justs, held under the authority of princes, were modified by the introduction of arms of courtesy, as they were termed; lances, namely, without heads, and with round braces of wood at the extremity called *rockets*, and swords without points, and with blunted edges. But the risk continued great, from bruises, falls, and the closeness of the defensive armour of the times, in which the wearers were often smothered. The weapons at *outrance* were afterwards chiefly used when knights of different and hostile countries engaged by appointment, or when some adventurous gallants took upon them the execution of an enterprise of arms (*pas d'armes*) in which they, as challengers, undertook, for a certain time, and under certain conditions, to support the honour of their country, or their mistresses, against all comers. These enterprises often ended fatally, but the knights who undertook them were received in the foreign countries which they visited in accomplishment of their challenge, with the highest deference and honour; their arrival was considered as affording a subject of sport and jubilee to all ranks; and when any mischance befell them, such as that of De Lindsay, who, in a tournament at Berwick, had his helmet nailed to his skull, by the truncheon of a lance which penetrated both, and died, after devoutly confessing himself, in the casque from which they could not disengage him, the knights who were spectators prayed

that God would vouchsafe them in his mercy a death so fair and so honourable. Stories of such challenges, with the minute details of the events of the combat, form frequent features in the histories of the age.

The contests of the tournament and the pas d'armes were undertaken merely in sport, and for thirst of honour. But the laws of the period afforded the adventurous knight other and more serious combats, in which he might exercise his valour. The custom of trying all doubtful cases by the body of a man, or, as it was otherwise expressed, by the judgment of God—in plain words, by referring the decision to the issue of a duel, prevailed universally among the Gothic tribes, from the highest antiquity. A *salvo* was devised, for the obvious absurdity of calling upon the weak to encounter the strong, a churchman to oppose a soldier, or age to meet in the lists with activity and youth. It was held that either party might appear personally, or by his champion. This sage regulation gave exercise for the valour of the knights, who were bound by their oaths to maintain the cause of those who had no other protector. And, indeed, there is good reason to think, that the inconveniences and injustice of a law so absurd in itself as that of judicial combat, were evaded and mitigated by the institutions of Chivalry, since, among the number of knights who were eagerly hunting after opportunities of military distinction, a party incapable of supporting his own cause by combat could have little difficulty in finding a formidable substitute; so that no one, however bold and confident, could prosecute an unjust cause to the uttermost, without the risk of encountering some champion of the innocent party, from among the number of hardy knights who traversed every country seeking ostensible cause of battle.

Besides these formal combats, it was usual for the adventurous knight to display his courage by stationing himself at some pass in a forest, on a bridge, or elsewhere, compelling all passengers to avouch the superiority of his own valour, and the beauty of his mistress, or otherwise to engage with him in single combat. When Alexius Comnenus received the homage of the

crusaders, seated upon his throne, previous to their crossing the Hellespont, during the first crusade, a French baron seated himself by the side of the Emperor of the East. Upon being reproved by Baldwin, he answered in his native language, "What ill-taught clown is this, [meaning Alexius] who dares to keep his seat when the flower of the European nobility are standing around him!" The Emperor, dissembling his indignation, desired to know the birth and condition of the audacious Frank. "I am," replied the baron, "of the noblest race of France. For the rest, I only know that there is near my castle a spot where four roads meet, and near it a church where men, desirous of single combat, spend their time in prayer till some one shall accept their challenge. Often have I frequented that chapel, but never met I one who durst accept my defiance." Thus the Bridge of Rodomont, in the Orlando Furioso, and the valiant defiance which the Knight of La Mancha hurled against the merchants of Toledo, who were bound to the fairs of Murcia, were neither fictions of Ariosto nor Cervantes, but had their prototypes in real history. The chivalrous custom of defying all and sundry to mortal combat, subsisted in the borders until the days of Queen Elizabeth, when the worthy Bernard Gilpin found in his church of Houghton le Spring a glove hung over the altar, which he was informed indicated a challenge to all who should take it down. The remnants of the judicial combats, and the enterprises of arms, may be found in the duels of the present day. In former times they still more resembled each other; for, in the seventeenth century, not only the seconds on each side regularly engaged, but it was usual to have more seconds, even to the number of five or six; a custom pleasantly ridiculed by Lord Chesterfield, in one of the papers of *The World*. It is obvious that a usage, at once so ridiculous, and so detrimental to the peace and happiness of society, must give way, in proportion to the progress of common sense. The custom is in general upon the wane, even as far as respects single combat between men who have actually given or taken offence at each other. The general

rules of good-breeding prevent causes of such disagreement from arising in the intercourse of society, and the forward duellist, who is solicitous in seeking them out, is generally accounted a vulgar and ferocious, as well as a dangerous character. At the same time, the habits derived from the days of Chivalry still retain a striking effect on our manners, and have fully established a graceful as well as useful punctilio, which tends on the whole to the improvement of society. Every man enters the world under the impression, that neither his strength, his wealth, his station, nor his wit, will excuse him from answering, at the risk of his life, any unbecoming encroachment on the civility due to the weakest, the poorest, the least important, or the most modest member of the society in which he mingles. All, too, in the rank and station of gentlemen, are forcibly called upon to remember, that they must resent the imputation of a voluntary falsehood as the most gross injury; and that the rights of the weaker sex demand protection from every one who would hold a good character in society. In short, from the wild and overstrained courtesies of Chivalry has been derived our present system of manners. It is not certainly faultless, and it is guarded by penalties which we must often regret as disproportionably severe. Yet it has a grace and dignity unknown to classic times, when women were slaves, and men coarse and vulgar, or overbearing and brutal, as suited their own humour, without respect to that of the rest of their society.

II. Such being the tone and spirit of Chivalry, derived from love, devotion, and valour,—we have next to notice the special forms and laws of the order, which will be found to correspond in every respect to the spirit which they were designed to foster.

The education of the future knight began at an early period. The care of the mother, after the first years of early youth were past, was deemed too tender, and the indulgences of the paternal roof too effeminate, for the future aspirant to the honours of Chivalry. "Do you not bless God," said the Lady Mabel to her hus-

band, the noble Duke Guerin of Montglaive, as on a solemn feast they looked on their four hopeful sons, "do you not bless God that has given you such a promising issue?"—"Dame," replied Guerin, in the true spirit of the age, "so help me God and Saint Martin! nothing can do me greater despite than to look on these four great lurdanes, who, arrived at such an age, yet do nothing but eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and spend their time in idle amusement."* To counteract these habits of indulgence, the first step to the order of knighthood was the degree of PAGE.

The young and noble stripling, generally about his twelfth year, was transferred from his father's house to that of some baron or gallant knight, sedulously chosen by the anxious parent as that which had the best reputation for good order and discipline. The children of the first nobles and high crown-vassals were educated by the royal court. And, however the reins of discipline might be in particular cases relaxed, or become corrupted in latter days, the theory was uniformly excellent. The youth who was to learn modesty, obedience, and address in arms and horsemanship, was daily exercised in the use of his weapons, beginning with such as were suited to his strength. He was instructed how to guide a horse with grace and dexterity; how to use the bow and the sword; how to manage the lance, an art which was taught by making him ride a career against a wooden figure holding a buckler called a quintaine. This quintaine turned on an axis; and as there was a wooden sword in the other hand of the supposed opponent, the young cavalier, if he did not manage his horse and weapon with address, was liable to receive a blow when the shock of his charge made the quintaine spin round.

Besides these exercises, the noble youth was required to do the work which, in some respects, belonged to a menial; but the task was not imposed on him as in a servile capacity. He attended his lord during the chase, the rules of which, as an image of war, and as

* *L'Hystoire de Guerin de Montglaive.*

held the principal occupation of a gentleman during peace, were carefully inculcated. He was taught the principal blasts or notes of *venerie*, to be sounded when the hounds were uncoupled, when the prey was on foot, when he was brought to bay, and when he fell. This art did not tend solely to amusement. "The gentle damosel," to use the language of the times, learned to bear the fatigue, the hunger, and thirst, which huntsmen are exposed to. By the necessity of encountering and despatching a stag, a boar, or a wolf, at bay, he acquired promptitude and courage in the use of his weapons. The accuracy with which he was required to mark the tracks of the hunted animal's course gave him habits of attention and reflection. In the days and nights spent in the chase, amid wide and pathless forests, he acquired the art, so necessary to a soldier, of remarking and studying the face of the country. When benighted, he was taught to steer his course by the stars, if they were visible; if not, to make his couch with patience on the withered leaves, or in a tree. Had he lost his way by day-time, he distinguished the points of the compass by remarking which side of the trees were most covered with moss, and from which they threw their branches most freely, circumstances which, compared with the known course of the prevailing wind, afforded him the necessary information.

The ceremonial of the chase was to be acquired, as well as its arts. To brittle or break the deer (in French, *faire la curée*), in plain terms, to flay and disembowel the stag, a matter in which much precision was required, and the rules of which were ascribed to the celebrated Sir Tristrem of Lionesse, was an indispensable requisite of the page's education. Nor did his concern with the venison end here; he placed it on the table, waited during the banquet, and carved the ponderous dishes, when required or permitted to do so. Much grace and delicacy, it was supposed, might be displayed on these occasions; and, in one romance, we read of the high birth and breeding of a page being ascertained, by his scrupulously declining to use a towel to wipe his hands, when washed before he began to

carve, and contented himself with waving them in the air till they dried of themselves. It is, perhaps, difficult to estimate the force of this delicacy, unless by supposing that he had not a towel or napkin appropriated to his own separate use.

Amidst these various instructions, the page was often required to wait upon the ladies, rather as attending a sort of superior beings, to whom adoration and obsequious service were due, than as ministering to the convenience of human creatures like himself. The most modest demeanour, the most profound respect, was to be observed in the presence of these fair idols. Thus the veneration due to the female character was taught to the acolyte of chivalry, by his being placed so near female beauty, yet prohibited the familiarity which might discover female weakness. Love frequently mingled with this early devotion, and the connexion betwixt some lady of distinction and her gallant knight, is often, in romantic fiction, supposed to have originated from such early affection. In a romance called *The Golden Thread* (of which we have only seen a modern edition in German, but which has many features of originality), when the daughter of the Count bestows her annual gifts on her father's household, she gives the page Leofried, in derision, a single thread of gold tissue. To show the value which he places upon the most minute memorial, coming from such a hand, the youth opens a wound in his bosom, and deposites the precious thread in the neighbourhood of his heart. The Dame des belles Cousines, whom we have already mentioned, was assuredly not the only lady of high rank who was tempted to give a handsome young page the benefit of her experience in completing his education. This led the way to abuse; and the custom of breeding up youths as pages in the houses of the great, although it survived the decay of Chivalry, was often rather the introduction to indolence, mischief, and debauchery, than to useful knowledge and the practice of arms. The proper purposes of this preliminary part of chivalrous education, are well given by one of the characters in Ben Jonson's *New Inn*, and he is answered by

another, who alleges, with satire resembling that of Juvenal, the modern corruptions of the order of pages. Lord Lovel has requested mine Host to give him his son for a page. The Host answers, by declaring, he would rather hang his child with his own hand,

"Than damn him to that desperate course of life.
Lovel. Call you that desperate, which, by a line
Of institution from our ancestors,
Hath been derived down to us, and received
In a succession, for the noblest way
Of breeding up our youth in letters, arms,
Fair mien, discourses, civil exercises,
And all the blazon of a gentleman?
Where can he learn to vault, to ride, to fence,
To mar his body gracefully, to speak
His language purer, or to turn his mind
Or manners more to the harmony of nature
Than in those nurseries of nobility?
Host. Ay, that was when the nursery's self was noble,
And only virtue made it, not the market."

And he replies, by enumerating instances of the decay of honour among the nobles, and of the debauchery of their household pages. In La Noue's *Political and Military Discourses*, is a similar complaint of the hazards to which the morals of youths of rank were exposed while acting in this domestic capacity. Nevertheless, the custom of having young gentlemen thus bred, continued, in a certain degree, down to the last century, although those destined to such employments became, by degrees, of a lower quality. In some few instances, the institution was maintained in its purity, and the page, when leaving the family in which he was educated, usually obtained a commission. The last instance we know, was that of a gentleman bred a page in the family of the Dutchess of Buccleuch and Monmouth, who died during the reign of George III., a general-officer in his Majesty's service.

When advancing age and experience in the use of arms had qualified the page for the hardships and dangers of actual war, he was removed from the lowest to the second gradation of Chivalry, and became an *Escuyer*, Esquire, or SQUIRE. The derivation of this phrase

has been much contested. It has been generally supposed to be derived from its becoming the official duty of the esquire to carry the shield (*Escu*) of the knight his master, until he was about to engage the enemy. Others have fetched the epithet (more remotely certainly) from *Scuria*, a stable, the charger of the knight being under the especial care of the squire. Others, again, ascribe the derivation of the word to the right which the squire himself had to carry a shield, and to blazon it with armorial bearings. This, in later times, became almost the exclusive meaning attached to the appellative esquire; and, accordingly, if the phrase now means anything, it means a gentleman having a right to carry arms. There is reason, however, to think, this is a secondary meaning of the word, for we do not find the word Escuyer, applied as a title of rank, until so late as the Ordonnance of Blois, in 1579.

The candidate for the honours of Chivalry, now an immediate attendant on the knight or nobleman, was withdrawn from the private apartments of the ladies, and only saw them upon occasions of stated ceremony. In great establishments, there were squires of different ranks, and destined for different services; but we shall confine ourselves to those general duties which properly belonged to the office. The squire assisted his master in the offices at once of a modern valet de chambre and groom—he attended to dress and undress him, trained his horses to the menage, and kept his arms bright and burnished. He did the honours of the household to the strangers who visited it, and the reputation of the prince or great lord whom he served, was much exalted by the manner in which these courteous offices were discharged. In the words of Chaucer, describing the character of the squire,

> "Curteis he was, lowly and servisable,
> And carf before his fader at the table."

The squire was also expected to perfect himself in the accomplishments of the period, and not only to be a master of the ceremonial of the feast, but to be capable

of enlivening it by his powers of conversation. He was expected to understand chess, draughts, and other domestic games. Poetry and music, if he had any turn for these beautiful arts, and whatever other accomplishments could improve the mind or the person, were accounted to grace his station. And accordingly, Chaucer's squire, besides that he was "singing or fluting all the day,"

> "—Could songs make, and well indite,
> Just, and eke dance, and well pourtray and write."

Unquestionably, few possessed all these attributes; but the poet, with his usual precision and vivacity, has given us the picture of a perfect esquire.

To understand the squires' mode of life more particularly, it is necessary to consider that which was led in the courts and castles of the middle ages. Froissart has given us a very striking account of the mode of house-keeping in the family of Gaston, Earl of Foix, a prince whose court was considered as a first-rate nursery for the noble youth; and, from his lively description, we may, in some measure, conceive the mode in which the esquires spent their time. Froissart abode in his house above twelve weeks, much recommended to the favourable notice of the Earl, by his having brought with him a book containing all the songs, ballads, and virilays, which Wencislaus of Bohemia, the gentle Duke of Brabant, had made, and the historian himself had compiled or transcribed. "Every night, after supper," says Froissart, "I read thereon to him, and while I read there was none durst speak anything to interrupt me, so much did the Earl delight in listening." The quotation necessary to describe the Earl of Foix, and the economy of his household, must necessarily be a long one, but it is a picture, by the hand of an inimitable artist, of a school of Chivalry when Chivalry was at its highest pitch, and we are unwilling to destroy the likeness by abridging it.

"This Erle Gascone of Foix, with whom I was, at that tyme, he was of a fyftie yere of age and nyne; and,

I say; I have in my tyme sene many knights, kynges, princes, and others, but I neuer saw none like him of personage; nor of so fayre forme, nor so well made; his vysage fayre, sanguyne, and smylyng, his eyen gray and amorous, wher as he lyst to set his regarde; in euery thing he was so parfite that he can not be praised to moche; he loued that ought to be beloued, and hated that ought to be hated: he was a wyse knyght, of highe enterprise, and of good counsayle; he neuer had myscreant with hym: he sayd many orisons every day, a nocturn of the psalter, matyns of our Lady, of the Holy Ghost, and of the Crosse, and dirigè euery day; he gaue fyue florins, in small monies, at his gate to poore folkes for the loue of God; he was large and courtesse in gyftes; he could ryght well take where it parteyned to hym, and to delyuer agayne wher as he ought; he loued houdes of all beestes, wynter and somer he loued huntyng; he neuer loued folly, outrage, nor foly larges: euery moneth he wolde knowe what he spended; he tooke in his countre to receyue his reuenwes, and to serue him, notable persons, that is to saye, xii. recyuours, and euer fro 11. monethes to two monethes, two of them shulde serue for his receyte; for, at the two monethes ende, he wolde change and put other two into that offiyce; and one that he trusted best shulde be his comptroller, and to hym all other shulde accompt, and the comptroller shulde accopt to hym by rolles and bokes written, and the comptes to remayne still with therle: he had certeyne cofers in his chambre, out of the whiche oftetymes he wolde take money to gyve to lordes, knyhtes, and squyers, such as came to hym, for none shulde departe from him without some gift, and yet dayly he multiplyed his treasure, to resyst the aduētures and fortunes that he doubted; he was of good and easy acquayntance with every man, and amorously wolde speke to thē; he was short in counsayle, and answers; he had four secretaries, and at his rising, they must ever be redy at his hande, without any callynge; and whan any letter were delyuered him, and that he had reed it, than he wolde calle them to write agayne, or els for some other thynge. In this estate

therle of Foix lyued. And at mydnight, whan he came out of his chambre into the hall to supper, he had ever before hym xii. torches brennying, borne by xii. varlettes standyng before his table all supper; they gaue a gret light, and the hall ever full of knightes and squyers, and many other tables dressed to suppe who wolde; ther was none should speke to hym at his table, but if he were called; his meate was lightlye wylde foule, the legges and wynges alonely, and in the day he dyd but lytell eate and drīke; he had great pleasure in armony of instrumētes; he coude do it right well hymself, he wolde have songes song before him, he wolde gladlye se conseytes and fantesies at his table. And or I came to his court, I had ben in many courtes of kynges, dukes, princes, erles, and great ladyes, but I was neuer in none y so well liked me, nor ther was none more reioysed in dedes of armes, than the erle dyde: ther was sene in his hall, chābre and court, knightes and squyers of honour going up and downe, and talking of armes and amours; all honour ther was found, all maner of tidynges of every realme and countre ther might be herde, for out of every coūtre there was resort, for the valyantnesse of this erle."*

While the courage of the young aspirant to the honours of knighthood was animated, and his emulation excited, by the society in which he was placed, and the conversation to which he listened,—while every thing was done which the times admitted to refine his manners, and, in a certain degree, to cultivate his understanding; the personal exercises to which he had been trained, while a page, were now to be pursued with increasing assiduity, proportional to the increase of his strength. "He was taught," says a historian, speaking of Bouçicaut, while a squire, "to spring upon a horse, while armed at all points; to exercise himself in running, to strike for a length of time with the axe or club; to dance and throw somersets, entirely armed, excepting the helmet; to mount on horseback behind one of his comrades, by barely laying his hands on his

* Froissart's *Chronicles*, translated by Lord Berners,

sleeve; to raise himself betwixt two partition walls to any height, by placing his back against the one, and his knees and hands against the other; to mount a ladder, placed against a tower, upon the reverse or under side, solely by the aid of his hands, and without touching the rounds with his feet; to throw the javelin, to pitch the bar," to do all, in short, which could exercise the body to feats of strength and agility, in order to qualify him for the exploits of war. For this purpose, the esquires had also their tourneys, separate and distinct from those of the knights. They were usually solemnized on the eve of the more formal and splendid tournaments, in which the knights themselves displayed their valour; and lighter weapons, than those of the knights, though of the same kind, were employed by the esquires. But, as we shall presently notice, the most distinguished among the esquires were (notwithstanding the high authority of the knight of La Mancha to the contrary) frequently admitted to the honours and dangers of the more solemn encounter.

In actual war the page was not expected to render much service, but that of the squire was important and indispensable. Upon a march he bore the helmet and shield of the knight and led his horse of battle, a tall heavy animal fit to bear the weight of a man in armour, but which was led in hand in marching, while the knight rode an ambling hackney. The squire was also qualified to perform the part of an armourer, not only lacing his master's helmet and buckling his cuirass, but also closing with a hammer the rivets by which the various pieces were united to each other. This was a point of the utmost consequence; and many instances occur of mischances happening to celebrated warriors when the duty was negligently performed. In the actual shock of battle, the esquire attended closely on the banner of his master, or on his person if he were only a knight bachelor, kept pace with him during the melée, and was at hand to remount him when his steed was slain, or relieve him when oppressed by numbers. If the knight made prisoners they were the charge of the esquire; if the esquire himself fortuned to make one, the ransom belonged to his master.

On the other hand, the knights who received these important services from their esquires, were expected to display towards them that courteous liberality which made so distinguished a point of the chivalrous character. Lord Audley led the van of the Black Prince's army at the battle of Poitiers, attended by four squires who had promised not to fail him. They distinguished themselves in the front of that bloody day, leaving such as they overcame to be made prisoners by others, and ever pressing forward where resistance was offered. Thus they fought in the chief of the battle until Lord James Audley was sorely wounded, and his breath failed him. At the last, when the battle was gained, the four faithful esquires bore him out of the press, disarmed him, and stanched and dressed his wounds as they could. As the Black Prince called for the man to whom the victory was in some measure owing, Lord Audley was borne before him in a litter, when the Prince, after having awarded to him the praise and renown above all others who fought on that day, bestowed on him five hundred marks of yearly revenue, to be assigned out of his heritage in England. Lord Audley accepted of the gift with due demonstration of gratitude; but no sooner was he brought to his lodging than he called before him the four esquires by whom he had been so gallantly seconded, and the nobles of his lineage, and informed his kinsmen, "Sirs, it hath pleased my Lord the Prince to bestow on me five hundred marks of heritage of which I am unworthy, for I have done him but small service. Behold, sirs, these four squires, which have always served me truly, and specially this day; the honour that I have is by their valour; therefore I resign to them and their heirs for ever, in like manner as it was given to me, the noble gift which the Prince hath assigned me." The lords beheld each other, and agreed it was a proof of great chivalry to bestow so royal a gift, and gladly undertook to bear witness to the transfer. When Edward heard these tidings, he sent for Lord Audley, and desired to know why he had bestowed on others the gift he had assigned him, and whether it had not been acceptable to him: "Sir," said Lord Audley,

"these four squires have followed me well and truly in several severe actions, and at this battle they served me so well, that had they done nothing else, I had been bound to reward them. I am myself but a single man, but, by aid of their united strength and valour, I was enabled to execute the vow which I had made, to give the onset in the first battle in which the King of England or his sons should be present, and had it not been for them, I must have been left dead on the field. This is the reason I have transferred your Highness's bounty, as to those by whom it was best deserved." The Black Prince not only approved of and confirmed Lord Audley's grant, but conferred upon him, not to be outdone in generosity, an yearly revenue of six hundred marks more, for his own use.* The names of the esquires, who thus distinguished themselves, and experienced such liberality at the hands of their leader, were Delves of Doddington, Dutton of Dutton, Fowlishurst of Crewe, and Hawkeston of Wreynehill, all Cheshire families. This memorable instance may suffice to show the extent of gratitude which the knights entertained for the faithful service of their squires. But it also leads us to consider some other circumstances relating to the order of esquire.

Although, in its primitive and proper sense, the state of esquire was merely preparatory to that of knighthood, yet it is certain that many men of birth and property rested content with attaining that first step; and, though greatly distinguished by their feats of arms, never rose, nor apparently sought to rise, above the rank which it conferred. It does not appear that any of the esquires of Lord Audley were knighted after the battle of Poitiers, although there can be no doubt that their rank, as well as their exploits, entitled them to expect that honour. The truth seems to be, that it may frequently have been more convenient, and scarcely less honourable, to remain in the unenvied and unpretending rank of esquire, than to aspire to that of knighthood, without a considerable fortune to supply the ex-

* Froissart. Barne's *History of Edward III.*

penses of that dignity. No doubt, in theory, the simplest knight bachelor was a companion, and in some degree equal, with princes. But, in point of fact, we shall presently see, that, where unsupported by some sort of income to procure suitable equipment and retainers, that dignity was sometimes exposed to ridicule. Many gallant gentlemen, therefore, remained esquires, either attached to the service of some prince or eminent nobleman, or frequently in a state of absolute independence, bringing their own vassals to the field, whom, in such cases, they were entitled to muster under a *Penoncele*, or small triangular streamer, somewhat like the naval pendant of the present day. The reader of history is not, therefore, to suppose, that, where he meets with an esquire of distinguished name, he is therefore, necessarily, to consider him as a youthful candidate for the honour of knighthood, and attending upon some knight or noble. This is, indeed, the primitive, but not the uniform meaning of the title. So many men of rank and gallantry appear to have remained esquires, that, by degrees, many of the leading distinctions between them and the knights were relaxed or abandoned. In Froissart's *Chronicles*, we find that esquires frequently led independent bodies of men, and, as we have before hinted, mingled with the knights in the games of Chivalry; the difference chiefly consisting in title, precedence, the shape of the flag under which they arrayed their followers, and the fashion of their armour. The esquires were permitted to bear a shield, emblazoned, as we have already seen, with armorial bearings. There seems to have been some difference in the shape of the helmet; and the French esquire was not permitted to wear the complete hauberk, but only the shirt of mail, without hood or sleeves. But the principal distinction between the independent esquire (terming him such who was attached to no knight's service) and the knight, was the spurs, which the esquire might wear of silver, but by no means gilded.

To return to the esquires most properly so termed, their dress was, during their period of probation, simple and modest, and ought regularly to have been made

of brown, or some other uniform and simple colour. This was not, however, essential. The garment of Chaucer's squire was embroidered like a meadow. The petit Jehan de Saintré was supplied with money by his mistress to purchase a silken doublet and embroidered hose. There is also a very diverting account, in the *Memoirs of Bertrand de Guesclin*, of the manner in which he prevailed on his uncle, a covetous old churchman, to assign him money for his equipment on some occasion of splendour. We may therefore hold, that the sumptuary laws of squirehood were not particularly attended to, or strictly enforced.

A youth usually ceased to be a page at fourteen, or a little earlier, and could not regularly receive the honour of knighthood until he was one-and-twenty. But, if their distinguished valour anticipated their years, the period of probation was shortened. Princes of the blood-royal, also, and other persons of very high eminence, had this term abridged, and sometimes so much so as to throw a ridicule upon the order of knighthood, by admitting within "the temple of honour," as it was the fashion of the times to call it, children, who could neither understand nor discharge the duties of the office to which they were thus prematurely called.

The third and highest rank of Chivalry was that of Knighthood. In considering this last dignity, we shall first enquire, how it was conferred; secondly, the general privileges and duties of the order; thirdly, the peculiar ranks into which it was finally divided, and the difference betwixt them.

Knighthood was, in its origin, an order of a republican, or at least an oligarchic nature; arising, as has been shown, from the customs of the free tribes of Germany, and, in its essence, not requiring the sanction of a monarch. On the contrary, each knight could confer the order of knighthood upon whomsoever preparatory noviciate and probation had fitted to receive it. The highest potentates sought the *accolade*, or stroke which conferred the honour, at the hands of the worthiest knight whose achievements had dignified the period. Thus Francis I. requested the celebrated Bayard,

the *Good Knight without reproach or fear*, to make him; an honour which Bayard valued so highly, that, on sheathing his sword, he vowed never more to use that blade, except against Turks, Moors, and Saracens. The same principle was carried to extravagance in a romance, where the hero is knighted by the hand of Sir Lancelot of the Lake, when dead. A sword was put into the hand of the skeleton, which was so guided as to let it drop on the neck of the aspirant. In the time of Francis I. it had already become customary to desire this honour at the hands of greatness rather than valour, so that the King's request was considered as an appeal to the first principles of Chivalry. In theory, however, the power of creating knights was supposed to be inherent in every one who had reached that dignity. But it was natural that the soldier should desire to receive the highest military honour from the general under whose eye he was to combat, or from the prince or noble at whose court he passed as page and squire through the gradations of his noviciate. It was equally natural, on the other hand, that the prince or noble should desire to be the immediate source of a privilege so important. And thus, though no positive regulation took place on the subject, ambition on the part of the aspirant, and pride and policy on that of the sovereign princes and nobles of high rank, gradually limited to the latter the power of conferring knighthood, or drew at least an unfavourable distinction between the knights dubbed by private individuals, and those who, with more state and solemnity, received the honoured title at the hand of one of high rank. Indeed, the change which took place respecting the character and consequences of the ceremony, naturally led to a limitation in the right of conferring it. While the order of knighthood merely implied a right to wear arms of a certain description, and to bear a certain title, there could be little harm in intrusting, to any one who had already received the honour, the power of conferring it on others. But when this highest order of Chivalry conferred not only personal dignity, but the right of assembling under the banner, or pennon, a certain number of

soldiers, when knighthood implied not merely personal privileges, but military rank, it was natural that sovereigns should use every effort to concentrate the right of conferring such distinction in themselves, or their immediate delegates. And latterly it was held, that the rank of knight only conferred those privileges on such as were dubbed by sovereign princes.

The times and place usually chosen for the creation of knights, were favourable to the claim of the sovereigns to be the proper fountain of Chivalry. Knights were usually made either on the eve of battle, or when the victory had been obtained; or they were created during the pomp of some solemn warning or grand festival. In the former case, the right of creation was naturally referred to the general or prince who led the host; and, in the latter, to the sovereign of the court where the festival was held. The forms in these cases were very different.

When knights were made in the actual field of battle, little solemnity was observed, and the form was probably the same with which private individuals had, in earlier times, conferred the honour on each other. The novice, armed at all points, but without helmet, sword, and spurs, came before the prince or general, at whose hands he was to receive knighthood, and kneeled down, while two persons of distinction, who acted as his godfathers, and were supposed to become pledges for his being worthy of the honour to which he aspired, buckled on his gilded spurs, and belted him with his sword. He then received the accolade, a slight blow on the neck, with the flat of the sword, from the person who dubbed him, who, at the same time, pronounced a formula to this effect: "I dub thee knight, in the name of God and St. Michael (or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). Be faithful, bold, and fortunate." The new-made knight had then only to take his place in the ranks of war, and endeavour to distinguish himself by his forward gallantry in the approaching action, when he was said to win his spurs. It is well known, that, at the battle of Cressy, Edward III. refused to send succours to the Black Prince,

until he should hear that he was wounded or dismounted, being determined he should, on that memorable day, have full opportunity to *win his spurs*. It may be easily imagined, that on such occasions, the courage of the young knights was wound up to the highest pitch, and, as many were usually made at the same time, their gallantry could not fail to have influence on the fortune of the day. At the siege of Tholouse (1159), Henry II. of England made thirty knights at once, one of whom was Malcolm IV. King of Scotland. Even on these occasions, the power of making knights was not understood to be limited to the commander-in-chief. At the fatal battle of Homildown, in 1401, Sir John Swinton, a warrior of distinguished talents, observing the slaughter made by the English archery, exhorted the Scots to rush on to a closer engagement. Adam Gordon, between whose family and that of Swinton, a deadly feud existed, hearing this sage counsel, knelt down before Swinton, and prayed him to confer on him the honour of knighthood, which he desired to receive from the wisest and boldest knight in the host. Swinton conferred the order; and they both rushed down upon the English host followed only by a few cavalry. If they had been supported, the attack might have turned the fate of the day. But none followed their gallant example, and both champions fell. It need hardly be added, that the commander, whether a sovereign prince or not, equally exercised the privilege of conferring knighthood. In the old ballad of the battle of Otterburn, Douglas boasts, that since he had entered England, he had

"With brand dubb'd many a knight."

But it was not in camps and armies alone that the honours of knighthood were conferred. At the *Cour Plenière*, a high court, to which sovereigns summoned their crown vassals at the solemn festivals of the church, and the various occasions of solemnity which occurred in the royal family, from marriage, birth, baptism, and the like, the monarch was wont to confer on novices in

chivalry its highest honour, and the ceremonies used on such investiture added to the dignity of the occasion. It was then that the full ritual was observed, which, on the eve of battle, was necessarily abridged or omitted. The candidates watched their arms all night in a church or chapel, and prepared for the honour to be conferred on them, by vigil, fast, and prayer. They were solemnly divested of the brown frock, which was the appropriate dress of the squire, and having been bathed, as a symbol of purification of heart, they were attired in the richer garb appropriate to knighthood. They were then solemnly invested with the appropriate arms of a knight; and it was not unusual to call the attention of the novice to a mystical or allegorical explanation of each piece of armour as it was put on. These exhortations consisted in strange and extravagant parallels betwixt the temporal and spiritual state of warfare, in which the metaphor was hunted down in every possible shape. The under dress of the knight was a close jacket of chamois leather, over which was put the mail shirt, composed of rings of steel artificially fitted into each other, as is still the fashion in some parts of Asia. A suit of plate armour was put on over the mail shirt, and the legs and arms were defended in the same manner. Even this accumulation of defensive armour, was by some thought insufficient. In the combat of the Infantes of Carrion with the champions of the Cid, one of the former was yet more completely defended, and to little purpose.

Onward into Ferrand's breast, the lance's point is driven
Full upon his breastplate, nothing would avail;
Two breastplates Ferrand wore, and a coat of mail,
The two are riven in sunder, the third stood him in stead,
The mail sunk in his breast, the mail and the spear head;
The blood burst from his mouth, that all men thought him dead.*

The novice being accoutred in his knightly armour, but without helmet, sword, and spurs, a rich mantle was flung over him, and he was conducted in solemn pro-

* See Translations from the Spanish Metrical Romance on the subject of the Cid, appended to Mr. Southey's Cid.

cession to the church or chapel in which the ceremony was to be performed, supported by his godfathers, and attended with as much pomp as circumstances admitted. High mass was then said, and the novice, advancing to the altar, received from the sovereign the accolade. The churchman present, of highest dignity, often belted on his sword, which, for that purpose, had been previously deposited on the altar, and the spurs were sometimes fastened on by ladies of quality. The oath of Chivalry was lastly taken, to be loyal to God, the king, and the ladies. Such were the outlines of the ceremony, which, however, was varied according to circumstances. A king of Portugal knighted his son in presence of the dead body of the Marquis of Marialva, slain in that day's action, and impressively conjured the young prince to do his duty in life and death like the good knight who lay dead before him. Alms to the poor, largesses to the heralds and minstrels, a liberal gift to the church, were necessary accompaniments to the investiture of a person of rank. The new-made knight was conducted from the church with music and acclamations, and usually mounted his horse and executed some curvets in presence of the multitude, couching his lance, and brandishing it as if impatient to open his knightly career. It was at such times, also, that the most splendid tournaments were executed, it being expected that the young knights would display the utmost efforts to distinguish themselves.

Such being the solemnities with which knighthood was imposed, it is no wonder that the power of conferring it should, in peace as well as in war, become more and more confined to sovereign princes, or nobles who nearly equalled them in rank and independence. By degrees these restrictions were drawn gradually closer, until at length it was held that none but a sovereign or a commander-in-chief, displaying the royal banner, and vested with plenary and vice-regal authority, could confer the degree of knighthood. Queen Elizabeth was particularly jealous of this part of her prerogative, and nothing more excited her displeasure and indignation against her favourite Essex, than the profuse-

ness with which he distributed the honour at Cadiz, and afterwards in Ireland. These anecdotes, however, belong to the decay of Chivalry.

The knight had several privileges of dignity and importance. He was associated into a rank wherein kings and princes were, in one sense, only his equals. He took precedence in war and in counsel, and was addressed by the respectful title of *Messire* in French, and *Sir* in English, and his wife by that of Madame and Dame. A knight was also, in point of military rank, qualified to command any body of men under a thousand. His own service was performed on horseback and in complete armour, of many various fashions, according to the taste of the warriors and the custom of the age. Chaucer has enumerated some of these varieties:—

> "With him ther wenten knights many on.
> Som wol ben armed in an habergeon,
> And in a brest plate, and in a gipon;
> And som wol have a pair of plates large;
> And som wol have a pruse sheld, or a targe;
> Some wol ben armed on his legges wele,
> And have an axe, and some a mace of stele.
> Ther n'is no newe guise, that it n'as old.
> Armed they weren, as I have you told,
> Everich after his opinion."

The weapons of offence, however, most appropriate to knighthood, were the lance and sword. They had frequently a battle-axe or mace at their saddle-bow, a formidable weapon even to men sheathed in iron like themselves. The knight had also a dagger, which he used when at close quarters. It was called the dagger of mercy, probably because, when unsheathed, it behoved the antagonist to crave mercy or to die. The management of the lance and of the horse was the principal requisite of knighthood. To strike the foeman either on the helmet or full upon the breast with the point of the lance, and at full speed, was accounted perfect practice; to miss him, or to break a lance across, *i. e.* athwart the body of the antagonist, without striking him with the point, was accounted an awkward

failure; to strike his horse, or to hurt his person under the girdle, was conceived a foul or felon action, and could only be excused by the hurry of a general encounter. When the knights, from the nature of the ground, or other circumstances, alighted to fight on foot, they used to cut some part from the length of their spears, in order to render them more manageable, like the pikes used by infantry. But their most formidable onset was when mounted and "in host." They seem then to have formed squadrons not unlike the present disposition of cavalry in the field,—their squires forming the rear-rank, or performing the part of serrefiles. As the horses were trained in the tourneys and exercises to run upon each other without flinching, the shock of two such bodies of heavy-armed cavalry was dreadful, and the event usually decided the battle; for, until the Swiss showed the superior steadiness which could be exhibited by infantry, all great actions were decided by the men-at-arms. The yeomanry of England, indeed, formed a singular exception; and, from the dexterous use of the long-bow, to which they were trained from infancy, were capable of withstanding and destroying the mail-clad chivalry both of France and Scotland. Their shafts, according to the exaggerating eloquence of a monkish historian, Thomas of Walsingham, penetrated steel coats from side to side, transfixed helmets, and even splintered lances, and pierced through swords! But, against every other pedestrian adversary, the knights, squires, and men-at-arms had the most decided advantage, from their impenetrable armour, the strength of their horses, and the fury of their onset. To render success yet more certain, and attack less hazardous, the horse, on the safety of which the rider's so much depended, was armed en-barbe, as it was called, like himself. A masque made of iron covered the animal's face and ears; it had a breast-plate, and armour for the croupe. The strongest horses were selected for this service; they were generally stallions, and to ride a mare was reckoned base and unknightly.

To distinguish him in battle, as his face was hid by

the helmet, the knight wore above his armour a surcoat, as it was called, like a herald's coat, on which his arms were emblazoned. Others had them painted on the shield, a small triangular buckler of light wood, covered with leather, and sometimes plated with steel, which, as best suited him, the knight could either wield on his left arm, or suffer to hang down from his neck, as an additional defence to his breast, when the left hand was required for the management of the horse. The shape of these shields is preserved, being that on which heraldic coats are most frequently blazoned. But it is something remarkable, that no one of those *heater** shields has been preserved in the Tower, or, so far as we know, in any English collection. The helmet was surmounted by a crest, which the knight adopted after his own fancy. There was deadly offence taken if one knight, without right, assumed the armorial bearings of another; and history is full of disputes on that head, some of which terminated fatally. The heralds were the persons appealed to on these occasions, when the dispute was carried on in peace, and hence flowed the science, as it was called, of Heraldry, with all its fantastic niceties. By degrees the crest and device became also hereditary, as well as the bearings on the shield. In addition to his armorial bearings, the knight distinguished himself in battle by shouting out his war-cry, which was echoed by his followers. It was usually the name of some favourite saint, united with that of his own family. If the knight had followers under his command, they re-echoed his war-cry, and rallied round his pennon or flag at the sound. The pennon differed from the penoncel, or triangular streamer which the squire was entitled to display, being double the breadth, and indented at the end like the tail of a swallow. It presented the appearance of two penoncels united at the end next the staff, a consideration which was not perhaps out of view in determining its shape. Of course, the reader will understand that those knights only dis-

* So called because resembling in shape the heater of a smoothing-iron.

played a pennon who had retainers to support and defend it; the mounting this ensign being a matter of privilege, not of obligation.

Froissart's heart never fails to overflow when he describes the encounter of a body of men-at-arms, arrayed in the manner we have described; he dwells with enthusiasm on the leading circumstances. The waving of banners and pennons, the dashing of spurs into the sides of chargers, and their springing forward to battle; the glittering of armour, the glancing of plumes, the headlong shock and splintering of the lances, the swords flashing through the dust over the heads of the combatants, the thunder of the horses' feet and the clash of armour, mingled with the war-cry of the combatants and the groans of the dying, form the mingled scene of tumult, strife, and death, which the Canon has so frequently transferred to his chivalrous pages.

It was not in war alone that the adventurous knight was to acquire fame. It was his duty, as we have seen, to seek adventures throughout the world, whereby to exalt his own fame and the beauty of his mistress, which inspired such deeds. In our remarks upon the general spirit of the institution, we have already noticed the frantic enterprizes which were seriously undertaken and punctually executed by knights desirous of a name. On those occasions, the undertaker of so rash an enterprize often owed his life to the sympathy of his foes, who had great respect for any one engaged in the discharge of a vow of chivalry. When Sir Robert Knowles passed near Paris, at the head of an English army, in the reign of Edward III., the following remarkable incident took place.

"Now it happened, one Tuesday morning, when the English began to decamp, and had set fire to all the villages wherein they were lodged, so that the fires were distinctly seen from Paris, a knight of their army, who had made a vow, the preceding day, that he would advance as far as the barriers and strike them with his lance, did not break his oath, but set off with his lance in his hand, his target on his neck, and completely armed except his helmet, and, spurring his steed, was fol-

lowed by his squire on another courser, carrying his helmet. When he approached Paris, he put on the helmet, which his squire laced behind. He then galloped away, sticking spurs into his horse, and advanced prancing to strike the barriers. They were then open, and the lords and barons within imagined he intended to enter the town; but he did not so mean, for having struck the gates according to his vow, he checked his horse and turned about. The French knights, who saw him thus retreat, cried out to him, 'Get away! get away! thou hast well acquitted thyself.' As for the name of this knight, I am ignorant of it, nor do I know from what country he came; but he bore for his arms gules à deux fousses noir, with une bordure noir non endentée.

"However, an adventure befell him, from which he had not so fortunate an escape. On his return, he met a butcher on the pavement in the suburbs, a very strong man, who had noticed him as he had passed him, and who had in his hand a very sharp and heavy hatchet with a long handle. As the knight was returning alone, and in a careless manner, the valiant butcher came on one side of him, and gave him such a blow between the shoulders, that he fell on his horse's neck: he recovered himself, but the butcher repeated the blow on his head, so that the axe entered it. The knight, through excess of pain, fell to the earth, and the horse galloped away to the squire, who was waiting for his master in the fields at the extremity of the suburbs. The squire caught the courser, but wondered what was become of his master; for he had seen him gallop to the barriers, strike them, and then turn about to come back. He therefore set out to look for him; but he had not gone many paces before he saw him in the hands of four fellows, who were beating him as if they were hammering on an anvil. This so much frightened the squire, that he dared not advance further, for he saw he could not give him any effectual assistance; he therefore returned as speedily as he could.

"Thus was this knight slain: and those lords who were posted at the barriers had him buried in holy

ground. The squire returned to the army, and related the misfortune which had befallen his master. All his brother warriors were greatly displeased thereat." (Johnes's *Froissart*, vol. II. p. 63.)

An equally singular undertaking was that of Galeazzo of Mantua, as rehearsed by the venerable Doctor Paris de Puteo, in his treatise *De Duello et re Militari*, and by Brantome in his *Essay on Duels*. Queen Joan of Naples, at a magnificent feast given in her castle of Gaeta, had presented her hand to Galeazzo, for the purpose of opening the ball. The dance being finished, the gallant knight kneeled down before his royal partner, and, in order to make fitting acknowledgment of the high honour done him, took a solemn vow to wander through the world wherever deeds of arms should be exercised, and not to rest until he had subdued two valiant knights, and had presented them prisoners at her royal foot-stool, to be disposed of at her pleasure. Accordingly, after a year spent in visiting various scenes of action in Brittany, England, France, Burgundy, and elsewhere, he returned like a falcon with his prey in his clutch, and presented two prisoners of knightly rank to Queen Joan. The queen received the gift very graciously; and, declining to avail herself of the right she had to impose rigorous conditions on the captives, she gave them liberty without ransom, and bestowed on them, over and above, several marks of liberality. For this she is highly extolled by Brantome and Dr. Paris, who take the opportunity of censuring the very opposite conduct of the Canons of Saint Peter's Church at Rome, upon whom a certain knight had bestowed a prisoner taken in single combat. These ungracious churchmen received the gift as if it had been that of a wild beast for a menagerie, permitting the poor captive the freedom of the church indeed, but prohibiting him to go one step beyond the gate. In which condition, worse than death, they detained the vanquished knight for some time, and were justly blamed, as neither understanding Christian charity nor gentleman-like courtesy.

We return to consider the duties of a knight. His

natural and proper element was war. But in time of peace when there was no scope for the fiery spirit of chivalry, the knights attended the tourneys proclaimed by different princes, or, if these amusements did not occur, they themselves undertook feats of arms, to which they challenged all competitors. The nature of these challenges will be best understood from an abridged account of the *pas d'armes*, called the *Juste* of Saint Inglebert, or Sandyng Fields. This emprise was sustained by three gallant knights of France, Bouçicaut, Reynold de Roy, and Saint Py or Saimpi. Their articles bound them to abide thirty days at Saint Inglebert, in the marches of Calais, there to undertake the encounter of all knights and squires, Frenchmen, or strangers, who should come hither, for the breaking of five spears, sharp, or with rockets, at their pleasure. On their lodgings they hung two shields called of peace and war, with their armorial blazons on each. The stranger desiring to just was invited to come or send, and touch which shield he would. The weapons of courtesy were to be employed if he chose the shield of peace, if that of war, the defenders were to give him the desired encounter with sharp weapons. The stranger knights were invited to bring some nobleman with them, to assist in judging the field, and the proclamation concludes with an entreaty to knights and squires strangers, that they will not hold this offer as made for any pride, hatred, or ill-will; but only that the challengers do it to have their honourable company and acquaintance, which, with their whole heart, they desire. They were assured of a fair field, without fraud or advantage; and it was provided, that the shields used should not be covered with iron or steel. The French king was highly joyful of this gallant challenge, (although some of his council doubted the wisdom of permitting it to go forth,) and exhorted the challengers to regard the honour of their prince and realm, and spare no cost at the solemnity, for which he was willing to contribute ten thousand franks. A number of knights and squires came from England to Calais to accept this gallant invitation; and at the entrance of the "fresh

and joly month of May," the challengers pitched three green pavilions in a fair plain between Calais and the Abbey of Saint Inglebert. Two shields hung before each pavilion, with the arms of the owner.

"On the 21st of the month of May, as it had been proclaimed, the three knights were properly armed and their horses properly saddled according to the laws of the tournament. On the same day, those knights who were in Calais sallied forth, either as spectators or tilters, and, being arrived at the spot, drew up on one side. The place of the tournament was smooth, and green with grass.

"Sir John Holland was the first who sent his squire to touch the war-target of Sir Bouçicaut, who instantly issued from his pavilion completely armed. Having mounted his horse, and grasped his spear, which was stiff and well-steeled, they took their distances. When the two knights had for a short time eyed each other, they spurred their horses, and met full gallop with such a force that Sir Bouçicaut pierced the shield of the Earl of Huntingdon, and the point of his lance slipped along his arm, but without wounding him. The two knights, having passed, continued their gallop to the end of the list. This course was much praised. At the second course, they hit each other slightly, but no harm was done; and their horses refused to complete the third.

"The Earl of Huntingdon, who wished to continue the tilt, and was heated, returned to his place, expecting that Sir Bouçicaut would call for his lance; but he did not, and showed plainly he would not that day tilt more with the earl. Sir John Holland, seeing this, sent his squire to touch the war-target of the Lord de Saimpi. This knight, who was waiting for the combat, sallied out from his pavilion, and took his lance and shield. When the earl saw he was ready, he violently spurred his horse, as did the Lord de Saimpi. They couched their lances, and pointed them at each other. At the onset, their horses crossed; notwithstanding which, they met; but by this crossing, which was blamed, the earl was unhelmed. He returned to his

people, who soon rehelmed him; and having resumed their lances, they met full gallop, and hit each other with such a force in the middle of their shields, they would have been unhorsed, had they not kept tight seats by the pressure of their legs against their horses' sides. They went to the proper places, where they refreshed themselves, and took breath.

"Sir John Holland, who had a great desire to shine at this tournament, had his helmet braced, and regrasped his spear; when the Lord de Saimpi, seeing him advance on the gallop, did not decline meeting, but, spurring his horse on instantly, they gave blows on their helmets, that were luckily of well-tempered steel, which made sparks of fire fly from them. At this course, the Lord de Saimpi lost his helmet; but the two knights continued their career, and returned to their places.

"This tilt was much praised, and the English and French said, that the Earl of Huntingdon, Sir Bouçicaut, and the Lord de Saimpi, had excellently well justed, without sparing or doing themselves any damage. The Earl wished to break another lance in honour of his lady, but it was refused him. He then quitted the lists to make room for others, for he had run his six lances with such ability and courage as gained him praise from all sides." (Johnes's *Froissart*, vol. IV. p. 143.)

The other justs were accomplished with similar spirit; Sir Peter Courtney, Sir John Russell, Sir Peter Sherburn, Sir William Clifton, and other English knights, sustaining the honour of their country against the French, who behaved with the greatest gallantry; and the whole was regarded as one of the most gallant enterprises which had been fulfilled for some time.

Besides these dangerous amusements, the unsettled and misruled state of things during the feudal times, found a gentle knight anxious to support the oppressed and to put down injustice, and, agreeably to his knightly vow, frequent opportunities to exercise himself in the use of arms. There were every where to be met with oppressors to be chastised, and evil customs to be abolished, and the knight's occupation not only permitted, but actually bound him to volunteer his services in such

cases. We shall err greatly if we suppose that the adventures told in romance, are as fictitious as its magic, its dragons, and its fairies. The machinery was indeed imaginary, or rather, like that of Homer, it was grounded on the popular belief of the times. But the turn of incidents resembled, in substance, those which passed almost daily under the eye of the narrator. Even the stupendous feats of prowess displayed by the heroes of those tales, against the most overwhelming odds, were not without parallel in the history of the times. When men fought hand to hand, the desperate exertions of a single champion, well mounted and armed in proof, were sometimes sufficient to turn the fate of a disputed day, and the war-cry of a well-known knight struck terror further than his arms. The advantage possessed by such an invulnerable champion over the half-naked infantry of the period, whom he might pursue and cut down at his pleasure, was so great, that, in the insurrection of the peasants called the *Jacquerie*, the Earl of Foix and the Captal de Buche, their forces not being nearly as one to ten, hesitated not to charge these disorderly insurgents with their men-at-arms, and were supposed to have slain nearly seven thousand, following the execution of the fugitives with as little mercy as the peasants had showed during the brief success of their rebellion.

The right which crown-vassals claimed and exercised, of imposing exorbitant tolls and taxes within their domains, was often resisted by the knights-errant of the day, whose adventures, in fact, approached much nearer to those of Don Quixote than perhaps our readers are aware of. For although the Knight of La Mancha was, perhaps, two centuries too late in exercising his office of redresser of wrongs, and although his heated imagination confounded ordinary objects with such as were immediately connected with the exercise of Chivalry, yet at no great distance from the date of the inimitable romance of Cervantes, real circumstances occurred, of a nature nearly as romantic as the achievements which Don Quixote aspired to execute. In the more ancient times, the wandering knight could not go far without finding some gentleman oppressed by a powerful neigh-

bour, some captive immured in a feudal dungeon, some orphan deprived of his heritage, some traveller pillaged, some convent or church violated, some lady in need of a champion, or some prince engaged in a war with a powerful adversary,—all of which incidents furnished fit occasion for the exercise of his valour. By degrees, as order became more generally established, and the law of each state began to be strong enough for the protection of the subject, the interference of these self-authorized and self-dependent champions, who besides were, in all probability, neither the most judicious or moderate, supposing them to be equitable, mediators, became a nuisance rather than an assistance to civil society; and undoubtedly this tended to produce those distinctions in the order of knighthood which we are now to notice.

The most ancient, and originally the sole order of knighthood, was that of the Knight-Bachelor. This was the proper degree conferred by one knight on another, without the interference either of prince, noble, or churchman, and its privileges and duties approached nearly to those of the knight-errant. Were it possible for human nature to have acted up to the pitch of merit required by the statutes of Chivalry, this order might have proved for a length of time a substitute for imperfect policy,—a remedy against feudal tyranny,—a resource for the weak when oppressed by the strong. Unquestionably, in many individual instances, knights were all that we have described them. But the laws of Chivalry, like those of the ascetic orders, while announcing a high tone of virtue and self-denial, unfortunately afforded the strongest temptations to those who professed its vows to abuse the character which they assumed. The degree of knighthood was easily attained, and did not subject the warrior on whom it was bestowed to any particular tribunal in case of his abusing the powers which it conferred. Thus the knight became, in many instances, a wandering and licentious soldier, carrying from castle to castle, and from court to court, the offer of his mercenary sword, and frequently abusing his character, to oppress those whom his oath bound him to protect. The license and foreign vices im-

ported by those who had returned from the crusades, the poverty also to which noble families were reduced by those fatal expeditions, all aided to throw the quality of knight-bachelor lower in the scale of honour, when unsupported by birth, wealth, or the command of followers.

The poorest knight-bachelor, however, long continued to exercise the privileges of the order. Their title of bachelor (or *Bas Chevalier*, according to the best derivation) marked that they were early held in inferior estimation to those more fortunate knights, who had extensive lands and numerous vassals. They either attached themselves to the service of some prince or rich noble, and were supported at their expense, or they led the life of mere adventurers. There were many knights, who, like Sir Gaudwin in the romance of *Partenopex de Blois*, subsisted by passing from one court, camp, and tournament, to another, and contrived even, by various means open to persons of that profession, to maintain, at least for a time, a fair and goodly appearance.

> "So riding, they o'ertake an errant—knight
> Well horsed, and large of limb, Sir Gaudwin hight;
> He nor of castle nor of land was lord,
> Houseless he reap'd the harvest of the sword:
> And now, not more on fame than profit bent,
> Rode with blythe heart unto the tournament;
> For cowardice he held it deadly sin,
> And sure his mind and bearing were akin,
> The face an index to the soul within.
> It seem'd that he, such pomp his train bewray'd,
> Had shaped a goodly fortune by his blade;
> His knaves were, point device, in livery dight,
> With sumpter-nags, and tents for shelter in the night."

These bachelor-knights, as Mr. Rose has well described Sir Gaudwin, set their principal store by valour in battle; and perhaps it was the only quality of Chivalry which they at all times equally prized and possessed. Their boast was to be the children of war and fight, living in no other atmosphere but what was mingled with the dust of conflict and the hot breath of

charging steeds. A "gentle bachelor" is so described in one of the *Fabliaux* translated by Mr. Way:

> "What gentle bachelor is he,
> Sword-begot in fighting field,
> Rock'd and cradled in a shield,
> Whose infant food a helm did yield."

His resistless gallantry in tournament and battle,—the rapidity with which he traversed land and sea, from England to Switzerland, to be present at each remarkable occasion of action,—with his hardihood in enduring every sort of privation,—and his generosity in rewarding minstrels and heralds,—his life of hazard and turmoil,—and his deeds of strength and fame,—are all enumerated. But we hear nothing of his redressing wrongs, or of his protecting the oppressed. The knight-bachelor, according to this picture, was a valiant prize-fighter, and lived by the exercise of his weapons.

In war, the knight-bachelor had an opportunity of maintaining, and even of enriching himself, if fortunate, by the ransom of such prisoners as he happened to make in fight. If, in this way, he accumulated wealth, he frequently employed it in levying followers, whose assistance, with his own, he hired out to such sovereigns as were willing to set a sufficient price on his services. In time of peace, the tournaments afforded, as we have already observed, a certain means of income to these adventurous champions. The horses and arms of the knights who succumbed on such occasions, were forfeited to the victors, and these the wealthy were always willing to reclaim by a payment in money. At some of the achievements in arms, the victors had the right, by the conditions of the encounter, to impose severe terms on the vanquished, besides the usual forfeiture of horse and armour. Sometimes the unsuccessful combatant ransomed himself from imprisonment, or other hard conditions, by a sum of money; a transaction in which the knight-bachelors, such as we have described them, readily engaged. These adventurers called the sword which they used

in tourneys, their *gagne-pain*, or bread-winner, as itinerant fiddlers of our day denominate their instruments.

> " Dont i est gaigne-pain nommée,
> Car par li est gagnies li pains."
> *Pelerinage du Monde*, par Guigneville.

Men of such roving and military habits, subsisting by means so precarious, and lying under little or no restraint from laws, or from the social system, were frequently dangerous and turbulent members of the commonwealth. Every usurper, tyrant, or rebel, found knights-bachelors to espouse his cause in numbers proportioned to his means of expenditure. They were precisely the " landless resolutes," whom any adventurer of military fame or known enterprise could easily collect,

> " For food and diet, to some enterprise
> That hath a stomach in't."

Sometimes knights were found who placed themselves directly in opposition to all law and good order, headed independent bands of depredators, or, to speak plainly, of robbers, seized upon some castle as a place of temporary retreat, and laid waste the country at their pleasure. In the disorderly reigns of Stephen and of King John, many such leaders of banditti were found in England. And France, in the reign of John and his successors, was almost destroyed by them. Many of these leaders were knights, or squires, and almost all pretended that in their lawless license they only exercised the rights of Chivalry, which permitted, and even enjoined, its votaries to make war without any authority but their own, whenever a fair cause of quarrel occurred.

These circumstances brought the professors of knight-bachelor into suspicion, as, in other cases, the poverty of those who held the honour exposed it to contempt in their person. The sword did not always reap a good harvest; an enterprise was unfortunate, or a knight was discomfited. In such circumstances, he was obliged to

sell his arms and horse, and endure all the scorn which is attached to poverty. In the beautiful lay of Lanval, and in the corresponding tale of Gruelan, the story opens with the picture of the hero reduced to indigence, dunned by his landlord, and exposed to contempt by his beggarly equipment. And when John de Vienne and his French men-at-arms returned from Scotland, disgusted with the poverty and ferocity of their allies, without having had any opportunity to become wealthy at the expense of the English, and compelled before their departure to give satisfaction for the insolencies which they committed towards the inhabitants, "divers knights and squires had passage and so returned, some into Flanders, and as wind and weather would drive them, without horse and harness, right poor and feeble, cursing the day that ever they came into Scotland, saying that never man had so hard a voyage." (Berners's *Froissart*, vol. II. (reprint) p. 32.) The frequent prohibition of tournaments, both by the church and by the more peaceful sovereigns, had also its necessary effect in impoverishing the knights-bachelors, to whom, as we have seen, these exhibitions afforded one principal means of subsistence. This is touched upon in one of the French *fabliaux*, as partly the cause of the poverty of a chevalier, whose distresses are thus enumerated:

"Listen, gentles, while I tell
How this knight in fortune fell:
Land nor vineyards had he none,
Justs and war his living won;
Well on horseback could he prance,
Boldly could he break a lance,
Well he knew each warlike use;
But there came a time of truce,
Peaceful was the land around,
Nowhere heard a trumpet sound;
Rust the shield and falchion hid,
Just and tourney were forbid;
All his means of living gone,
Ermine mantle had he none,
And in pawn had long been laid
Cap and mantle of brocade,

Harness rich and charger stout,
All were eat and drunken out."*

As the circumstances which we have mentioned, tended to bring the order of knight-bachelor in many instances into contempt, the great and powerful attempted to entrench themselves within a circle which should be inaccessible to the needy adventurers whom we have described. Hence the institution of Knights-Banneret was generally received.

The distinction betwixt the knight-banneret and the knight-bachelor was merely in military rank and precedence, and the former may rather be accounted an institution of policy than of Chivalry. The bachelor displayed, or was entitled to display, a pennon or forked ensign. The knight-banneret had the right of raising a proper *banner*, from which his appellation was derived. He held a middle rank, beneath the barons or great feudatories of the Crown, and above the knights bachelors. The banner from which he took his title was a flag squared at the end, which, however, in strictness was oblong, and not an exact square on all the sides, which was the proper emblem of a baron. Du Tillet reports, that the Count de Laval challenged Sir Roul de Couequens' right to raise a square banner, being a banneret, and not a baron, and adds, that he was generally ridiculed for this presumption, and called the knight with the square ensign. The circumstance of the encroachment plainly shows, that the distinction was not absolutely settled, nor have we found the ensign of the bannerets any where described except as being generally a square standard. Indeed, it was only the pennon of the knight a little altered; for he who aspired to be a banneret received no higher gradation in Chivalry, as attached to his person, and was inducted into his new privileges, merely by the commander-in-chief, upon the eve of battle, cutting off the swallow-tail or forked termination of the pennon.

In the appendix to Joinville's *Memoirs*, there is an

* See the original in the republication of Barbazan's *Fabliaux*, vol. III. p. 410.

essay on the subject of the bannerets, in which the following account of them is quoted from the ancient book of Ceremonies:

"Comme un bachelier peut lever banniere, et devenir banneret.

"Quant un bachelier a grandement servi et suivy la guerre, et que il a assez terre, et que 'il puisse avoir gentilshommes, ses hommes, et pour accompagner sa banniere, il peut licitement lever banniere, et non autrement. Car nul homme ne doit porter, ne lever banniere en bataille, s'il n'a du moins cinquante hommes d'armes, tous ses hommes et les archiers et arbalestriers qui y appartiennent. Et s'il les a 'il doit à la premiere battaille, ou il se trouvera, apporter un pennon de ses armes, et doit venir au connestable, ou aux marischaux, ou à celui qui sera lieutenant de l'ost pour le prince, requirer qu'il porte banniere; et s'il lui octroient, doit sommer les heraux pour tesmoignage, et doivent couper la queüe du pennon, et alors le doit porter et lever avant les autres bannieres, au dessoubs des autres barons."

There is this same ceremonial, in a chapter respecting the banneret, in these terms:

"Comme se doit maintenir un banneret en bataille.

"Le banneret doit avoir cinquante lances, et les gens de trait qui y appartiennent: c'est à savoir les xxv. pour lui, et sa banniere garder. Et doit estre sa banniere dessoubs des barons. Et s'il y a autres banniere ils doivent mettre leurs bannieres à l'onneur, chacun selon son endroit, et pareillement tout homme qui porte banniere."

Froissart, always our best and most amusing authority, gives an account of the manner in which the celebrated Sir John Chandos was made banneret by the Black Prince, before the battle of Navarete. The whole scene forms a striking picture of an army of the middle ages moving to battle. Upon the pennons of the knights, penoncels of the squires, and banners of the barons and bannerets, the army formed, or, in modern phrase, dressed its line. The usual word for the attack was, "Advance banners, in the name of God and Saint George."

"When the sun was risen, it was a beautiful sight to view these battalions, with their brilliant armour glittering with its beams. In this manner, they nearly approached to each other. The Prince, with a few attendants, mounted a small hill, and saw very clearly the enemy marching straight towards them. Upon descending this hill, he extended his line of battle in the plain, and then halted.

"The Spaniards, seeing the English had halted, did the same, in order of battle; then each man tightened his armour, and made ready as for instant combat.

"Sir John Chandos advanced in front of the battalions with his banner uncased in his hand. He presented it to the Prince, saying, 'My lord, here is my banner; I present it to you, that I may display it in whatever manner shall be most agreeable to you; for, thanks to God, I have now sufficient lands that will enable me so to do, and maintain the rank which it ought to hold.'

"The Prince, Don Pedro being present, took the banner in his hands, which was blazoned with a sharp stake gules, on a field argent; after having cut off the tail to make it square, he displayed it, and, returning it to him by the handle, said, 'Sir John, I return you your banner, God give you strength and honour to preserve it.'

"Upon this, Sir John left the Prince, went back to his men, with the banner in his hand, 'Gentlemen, behold my banner and yours; you will, therefore, guard it as it becomes you.' His companions, taking the banner, replied with much cheerfulness, that 'if it pleased God and St. George, they would defend it well, and act worthily of it, to the utmost of their abilities.'

"The banner was put into the hands of a worthy English squire, called William Allestry, who bore it with honour that day, and loyally acquitted himself in the service. The English and Gascops soon after dismounted on the heath, and assembled very orderly together, each lord under his banner or pennon, in the same battle-array as when they passed the mountains. It was delightful to see and examine these banners and pennons, with the noble army that was under them."

It should not be forgotten, that Sir John Chandos exerted himself so much to maintain his new honour, that, advancing too far among the Spaniards, he was unhorsed, and, having grappled with a warrior of great strength, called Martin Ferrand, he fell undermost, and must have been slain had he not bethought him of his dagger, with which he stabbed his gigantic antagonist. (Johnes's *Froissart*, vol. I. p. 731.)

A banneret was expected to bring into the field at least thirty men-at-arms, that is, knights or squires mounted, and in complete order, at his own expense. Each man-at-arms, besides his attendants on foot, ought to have a mounted crossbow-man, and a horseman armed with a bow and axe. Therefore, the number of horsemen alone, who assembled under a banner, was at least three hundred, and, including followers on foot, might amount to a thousand men. The banneret might, indeed, have arrayed the same force under a pennon, but his accepting a banner bound him to bring out that number at least. There is no room, however, to believe, that these regulations were very strictly observed.

In the reign of Charles VII., the nobles of France made a remonstrance to the King, setting forth, that their estates were so much wasted by the long and fatal wars with England, that they could no longer support the number of men attached to the dignity of banneret. The companies of men-at-arms, which had hitherto been led by knights of that rank, and the distinction between knights-bannerets and knights-bachelors, was altogether disused from that period.* In England the title survived, but in a different sense. Those who received knighthood in a field of battle, where the royal standard was displayed, were called knights-banneret. Thus, King Edward VI. notices in his *Journal*, that, after the battle of Pinkie, "Mr. Brian Sadler and Vane were made bannerets."

The distinction of banneret was not the only subdi-

* See the works of Pasquier, Du Tillet, Le Geudre, and other French antiquaries.

vision of knighthood. The special privileged fraternities, orders, or associations, of knights, using a particular device, or embodied for a particular purpose, require also to be noticed. These might, in part, be founded upon the union which knights were wont to enter into with each other as "companions in arms," than which nothing was esteemed more sacred. The partners were united for weal and woe, and no crime was accounted more infamous than to desert or betray a companion-at-arms. They had the same friends and the same foes; and, as it was the genius of Chivalry to carry every virtuous and noble sentiment to the most fantastic extremity, the most extravagant proofs of fidelity to this engagement were often exacted or bestowed. The beautiful romance of *Ames and Amelien*, in which a knight slays his own child to make a salve with its blood to cure the leprosy of his brother-in-arms, turns entirely on this extravagant pitch of sentiment.

To this fraternity only two persons could, with propriety, bind themselves. But the various orders, which had in view particular objects of war, or were associated under the authority of particular sovereigns, were also understood to form a bond of alliance and brotherhood amongst themselves.

The great orders of the Templars and Knights-Hospitallers of Saint John of Jerusalem, as well as that of the Teutonic Knights, were military associations, created, the former for defence of the Holy Land, and the last for conversion (by the edge of the sword of course) of the Pagans in the north of Europe. They were managed by commanders or superintendants, and by a grand master, forming a sort of military republic, the individuals of which were understood to have no distinct property or interest from the order in general. But the system and history of these associations will be found under the proper heads.* It is here only necessary to notice them as subdivisions of the knighthood, or Chivalry of Europe.

* It may here and elsewhere be recollected, that this article was originally written for an Encyclopædia.

Other subdivisions arose from the various associations, also called orders, formed by the different sovereigns of Europe, not only for the natural purpose of drawing around their persons the flower of knighthood, but often with political views of much deeper import. The romances which were the favourite reading of the time, or which, at least, like the servant in the comedy, the nobles "had read to them," and which were on all occasions quoted gravely, as the authentic and authoritative records of Chivalry, afforded the most respectable precedents for the formation of such fraternities under the auspices of sovereign princes; the Round Table of King Arthur, and the Paladins of Charlemagne, forming cases strictly in point. Edward III., whose policy was equal to his love of Chivalry, failed not to avail himself of these precedents, not only for the exaltation of military honour and exercise of warlike feats, but questionless that he might draw around him, and attach to his person, the most valiant knights from all quarters of Europe. For this purpose, in the year 1344, he proclaimed, as well in Scotland, France, Germany, Hainault, Spain, and other foreign countries, as in England, that he designed to revive the Round Table of King Arthur, offering free conduct and courteous reception to all who might be disposed to attend the splendid justs to be held upon that occasion at Windsor Castle. This solemn festival, which Edward proposed to render annual, excited the jealously of Philip de Valois, King of France, who not only prohibited his subjects to attend the Round Table at Windsor, but proclaimed an opposite Round Table to be held by himself at Paris. In consequence of this interference, the Festival of Edward lost some part of its celebrity, and was diminished in splendour and frequency of attendance. This induced King Edward to establish the memorable Order of the Garter. Twenty-six of the most noble knights of England and Gascony were admitted into this highly honourable association, the well-known motto of which (*Honni soit qui mal y pense*) seems to apply to the misrepresentations which the French monarch might throw out respecting the order of the Garter, as he had already done

concerning the festival of the Round Table. There was so much dignity, as well as such obvious policy, in selecting from the whole body of Chivalry a select number of champions, to form an especial fraternity under the immediate patronage of the sovereign; it held out such a powerful stimulus to courage and exertion to all whose eyes were fixed on so dignified a reward of ambition, that various orders were speedily formed in the different courts of Europe, each having its own peculiar badges, emblems, and statutes. To enumerate these is the task of the herald, not of the historian, who is only called upon to notice their existence and character. The first effect of these institutions on the spirit of Chivalry in general, was doubtless favourable, as holding forth to the knighthood a high and honourable prize of emulation. But when every court in Europe, however petty, had its own peculiar order and ceremonial, while the great potentates established several; these dignities became so common, as to throw into the shade the order of Knights Bachelors, the parent and proper degree of Chivalry, in comparison to which the others were mere innovations. The last distinction introduced, when the spirit of Chivalry was almost totally extinguished, was the degree of Knight Baronet.

The degree of Baronet, or of hereditary knighthood, might have been, with greater propriety, termed an inferior rank of noblesse, than an order of Chivalry. Nothing can be more alien from the original idea of Chivalry, than that knighthood could be bestowed on an infant, who could not have deserved the honour, or be capable of discharging its duties. But the way had been already opened for this anomaly, by the manner in which the orders of foreign knighthood had been conferred upon children, and infants in nonage. Some of these honours were also held by right of blood; the Dauphin of France, for example, being held to be born a knight of the Holy Ghost, without creation; and men had already long lost sight of the proper use and purpose of knighthood, which was now regarded and valued only as an honorary distinction of rank, that imposed no duties, and required no qualifications, or period of

preliminary noviciate. Still it was judged necessary in the terms of this new dignity, to avoid or rather elude the impropriety of declaring that a baronet's apparent heir should be a knight from the cradle. In the patent of baronetcy was therefore introduced a clause by which the King engaged for himself and his successors, to confer the degree of knighthood upon the eldest son of the baronet, so soon as he should attain the age of twenty-one years complete. Hence, if the father died while the son was in minority, it seems that the heir, though a baronet, was not properly a knight; and in like manner, if he claimed the right to be knighted during his father's lifetime, he was a knight-bachelor only until his father's death. Hence, too, the old and strictly proper style of Knight and Baronet—and hence that, in the seventeenth century, we recognise so frequently the existence of two knights, father and son, in the same family. But this attention to form has been long disused; and while the child in the cradle immediately takes the title on his father's death, it has been of late unusual for the eldest son of a baronet to avail himself of the clause in the patent entitling him to the honour of knighthood during his father's life. The creation of this new dignity, as is well known, was a device of James I. to fill those coffers which his folly and profusion had emptied; and although the pretext of a Nova Scotia, or of an Ulster settlement, was used as the apology for the creation of the order, yet it was perfectly understood, that the real value given was the payment of a certain sum of money. The cynical Osborne describes this practice of the sale of honours, which, in their origin, were designed as the reward and pledge of chivalrous merit, with satirical emphasis.

"At this time the honour of knighthood, which antiquity reserved sacred, as the cheapest and readiest jewel to present virtue with, was promiscuously laid on any head belonging to the yeomanry (made addle through pride and a contempt of their ancestor's pedigree), that had but a court-friend, or money to purchase the favour of the meanest able to bring him into an outward roome, when the king, the fountaine of ho-

nour, came downe, and was uninterrupted by other businesse: in which case, it was then usuall for him to grant a commission for the chamberlaine, or some other lord to do it."

Having related the manner in which knighthood was conferred, and the various subdivisions of the order in general, it is proper also to notice the mode in which a knight might be degraded from his rank. This forfeiture might take place from crimes either actually committed, or presumed by the law of arms. The list of crimes for which a knight was actually liable to degradation corresponded to his duties. As devotion, the honour due to ladies, valour, truth, and loyalty, were the proper attributes of Chivalry,—so heresy, insults or oppression of females, cowardice, falsehood, or treason, caused his degradation. And Heraldry, an art which might be said to bear the shield of Chivalry, assigned to such degraded knights and their descendants peculiar bearings, called in Blazonry abatements, though it may be doubted if these were often worn or displayed.

The most common case of a knight's degradation occurred in the appeal to the judgment of God by the single combat in the lists. In the appeal to this awful criterion, the combatants, whether personally concerned, or appearing as champions, were understood, in martial law, to take on themselves the full risk of all consequences. And, as the defendant, or his champion, in case of being overcome, was subjected to the punishment proper to the crime of which he was accused, so the appellant, if vanquished, was, whether a principal or substitute, condemned to the same doom to which his success would have exposed the accused. Whichever combatant was vanquished, he was liable to the penalty of degradation; and, if he survived the combat, the disgrace to which he was subjected was worse than death. His spurs were cut off, close to his heels, with a cook's cleaver; his arms were baffled and reversed by the common hangman; his belt was cut to pieces, and his sword broken. Even his horse showed his disgrace, the animal's tail being cut off, close to the rump, and thrown on a dunghill. The death-bell tolled, and the funeral service

was said, for a knight thus degraded, as for one dead to knightly honour. And, if he fell in the appeal to the judgment of God, the same dishonour was done to his senseless corpse. If alive, he was only rescued from death to be confined in the cloister. Such, at least, were the strict rules of Chivalry, though the courtesy of the victor, or the clemency of the prince, might remit them in favourable cases.

Knights might also be degraded without combat, when convicted of a heinous crime. In Stowe's *Chronicle*, we find the following minute account of the degradation of Sir Andrew Harclay, created Earl of Carlisle, by Edward II. for his valiant defence of that town against the Scots, but afterwards accused of traitorous correspondence with Robert the Bruce, and tried before Sir Anthony Lucy.

"He was ledde to the barre as an earle worthily apparelled, with his sword girt about him, horsed, booted, and spurred, and unto whom Sir Anthony spake in this manner. Sir Andrew (quoth he), the King, for thy valiant service, hath done thee great honour, and made thee Earle of Carlisle; since which tyme, thou, as a traytor to thy Lord the King, leddest his people, that shoulde have holpe him at the battell of Heighland, awaie by the county of Copland, and through the earledom of Lancaster, by which meanes, our Lorde the King was discomfitted there of the Scottes, through thy treason and falsenesse; whereas, if thou haddest come betimes, he hadde had the victorie: and this treason thou committedst for ye great summe of golde and silver that thou receivedst of James Dowglasse, a Scot, the King's enemy. Our Lord the King will, therefore, that the order of knighthood, by the which thou receivedst all thine honour and worship uppon thy bodie, be brought to nought, and thy state undone, that other knights, of lower degree, may after thee beware, and take example truely to serve.

"Then commanded he to hewe his spurres from his heeles, then to break his sword over his head, which the King had given him to keepe and defend his land therewith, when he made him Earle. After this, he

let unclothe him of his furred tabard, and of his hoode, of his coate of armes, and also of his girdle: and when this was done, Sir Anthony sayde unto him, Andrewe (quoth he), now art thou no knight, but a knave; and, for thy treason, the King will that thou shalt be hanged and drawne, and thyne head smitten off from thy bodie, and burned before thee, and thy bodie quartered: and thy head being smitten off, afterwarde to be set upon London bridge, and thy foure quarters shall be sent into foure good townes of England, that all other may beware by thee. And as Anthony Lucy hadde sayde, so was it done in all things, on the last daie of October."

III. We are arrived at the third point proposed in our arrangement, the causes, namely, of the decay and extinction of Chivalry.

The spirit of Chivalry sunk gradually under a combination of physical and moral causes; the first arising from the change gradually introduced into the art of war, and the last from the equally great alteration produced by time in the habits and modes of thinking in modern Europe. Chivalry began to dawn in the end of the tenth, and beginning of the eleventh century. It blazed forth with high vigour during the Crusades, which indeed may be considered as exploits of national knight-errantry, or general wars, undertaken on the very same principles which actuated the conduct of individual knights adventurers. But its most brilliant period was during the wars between France and England, and it was unquestionably in those kingdoms, that the habit of constant and honourable opposition, unembittered by rancour or personal hatred, gave the fairest opportunity for the exercise of the virtues required from him whom Chaucer terms "a very perfect gentle knight." Froissart frequently makes allusions to the generosity exercised by the French and English to their prisoners, and contrasts it with the dungeons to which captives taken in war were consigned, both in Spain and Germany. Yet both these countries, and indeed every kingdom in Europe, partook of the spirit of Chivalry in a greater or less degree; and even the

Moors of Spain caught the emulation, and had their orders of knighthood as well as the Christians. But, even during this splendid period, various causes were silently operating the future extinction of the flame, which blazed thus wide and brightly.

An important discovery, the invention of gunpowder, had taken place, and was beginning to be used in war, even when Chivalry was in its highest glory. It is said Edward III. had field-pieces at the battle of Cressy, and the use of guns is mentioned even earlier. But the force of gunpowder was long known and used, ere it made any material change in the art of war. The long-bow continued to be the favourite, and it would seem the more formidable missile weapon, for almost two centuries after guns had been used in war. Still every successive improvement was gradually rendering the invention of fire-arms more perfect, and their use more decisive of the fate of battle. In proportion as they came into general use, the suits of defensive armour began to be less generally worn. It was found, that these cumbrous defences, however efficient against lances, swords, and arrows, afforded no effectual protection against these more forcible missiles. The armour of the knight was gradually curtailed to a light head-piece, a cuirass, and the usual defences of men-at-arms. Complete harness was only worn by generals and persons of high rank, and that rather, it would seem, as a point of dignity than for real utility. The young nobility of France, especially, became weary of the unwieldy steel coats in which their ancestors sheathed themselves, and adopted the slender and light armour of the German Reiters, or mercenary cavalry. They also discontinued the use of the lance; in both cases, contrary to the injunctions of Henry IV. and the opinion of Sully. At length, the arms of the cavalry were changed almost in every particular from those which were proper to Chivalry; and as, in such cases, much depends upon outward show and circumstance, the light-armed cavalier, who did not carry the weapons, or practise the exercises of knighthood, laid aside, at the same time, the habits and sentiments peculiar to the order.

Another change, of vital importance, arose from the institution of the bands of gens-d'armes, or men-at-arms in France, constituted, as we have observed, expressly as a sort of standing army, to supply the place of bannerets, bachelors, squires, and other militia of early times. It was in the year 1445, that Charles VII. selected from the numerous Chivalry of France fifteen companies of men-at-arms, called Les Compagnies d'Ordonnance, which were to remain in perpetual pay and subordination, and for the purpose of enabling the sovereign to dispense with the services of the tumultuary forces of Chivalry, which, arriving and departing from the host at pleasure, collecting their subsistence by oppressing the country, and engaging in frequent brawls with each other, rather weakened than aided the cause they professed to support. The regulated companies, which were substituted for these desultory feudal levies, were of a more permanent and manageable description. Each company contained an hundred men-at-arms, and each man-at-arms was to be what was termed a *lance garnie*, that is, a mounted spearman, with his proper attendants, being four archers and a varlet, called *coustillier*, from the knife or dagger with which he was armed. Thus, each company consisted of six hundred horse, and the fifteen bands amounted to fifteen thousand cavalry. The charge of national defence was thus transferred from the Chivalry of France, whose bold and desperate valour was sometimes rendered useless by their independent wilfulness and want of discipline, to a body of regular forces, whose officers (a captain, lieutenant, and an ensign in each company) held command, not in virtue of their knighthood or banner-right, but as bearing direct commissions from the crown, as in modern times. At first, indeed, these bands of regulated gens-d'armes were formed of the same materials as formerly, though acting under a new system. The officers were men of the highest rank; the archers, and even the varlets, were men of honourable birth. When the Emperor Maximilian proposed that the French gens-d'armes should attempt to storm Padua, supported by the German lance-knechts or infantry, he was in-

formed by Bayard, that, if the French men-at-arms were employed, they must be supported by those of the Germans, and not by the lance-knechts, because, in the French companies of ordonnance, every soldier was a gentleman. But, in the reign of Charles IX., we find the change natural to such a new order of things, was in complete operation. The king was content to seek, as qualifications for his men-at-arms, personal bravery, strength, and address in the use of weapons, without respect to rank or birth; and, probably, in many instances, men of inferior birth were preferred to fill up the ranks of these regulated bands. Monluc informs us in his *Commentaries*, that he made his first campaign, as an archer, in the Marechal de Foix's company of gens-d'armes: it was "a situation much esteemed in those days, when many nobles served in that capacity. At present, the rank is greatly degenerated." The complaints of the old noblesse, says Mezerai, were not without reason. Mean carabineers, they said, valets and lacqueys, were recruited in companies, which were put on the same footing with the ancient corps of gens-d'armes, whose officers were all barons of high rank, and almost every man-at-arms a gentleman by birth. These complaints, joined with the charge against Catharine of Medicis, that she had, by the creation of twenty-five new members of the order of Saint Michael, rendered its honours as common as the cockle-shells on the sea-shore, serve to show how early the first rude attempt at establishing a standing and professional army operated to the subversion of the ideas and privileges of Chivalry. According to La Noue, it would seem that, in his time, the practice still prevailed of sending youths of good birth to serve as pages in the gens-d'armes; but, from the sort of society with whom they mixed in service of that sort, their natural spirit was rather debased, and rendered vulgar and brutal, than trained to honour and gallantry.

A more fatal cause had, however, been for some time operating in England as well as France, for the destruction of the system we are treating of. The wars of York and Lancaster in England, and those of

the Huguenots and of the League, were of a nature so bitter and rancorous, as was utterly inconsistent with the courtesy, fair play, and gentleness, proper to Chivalry. Where different nations are at strife together, their war may be carried on with a certain degree of moderation. "During the foreign wars between France and Spain, especially in Piedmont," says La Noue, "we might often see a body of spears pass a village, where the peasants only interrupted their village dance to offer them refreshments; and, in a little after, a hostile troop receive, from the unoffending and unoffended inhabitants, the same courtesy. The two bodies would meet and fight gallantly, and the wounded of both parties would be transferred to the same village, lodged in the same places of accommodation, receive the same attention, and rest peaceably on each other's good faith till again able to take the field." He contrasts this generosity with the miserable oppression of the civil wars, carried on by murdering, burning, and plundering, friend and foe, armed and unarmed, alleging, all the while, the specious watch-words of God's honour, the King's service, the Catholic religion, the Gospel, our Country. In the end, he justly observes, "the soldiers become ravenous beasts, the country is rendered desert, wealth is wasted, the crimes of the great become a curse to themselves, and God is displeased." The bloody wars of the Rose in England, the execution of prisoners on each side, the fury and animosity which allowed no plea of mercy or courtesy, were scarce less destructive of the finer parts of the spirit of Chivalry in England, than those of the Huguenots in France.

The Civil Wars not only operated in debasing the spirit of Chivalry, but in exhausting and destroying the particular class of society from which its votaries were drawn. To be of noble birth was not, indeed, absolutely essential to receiving the honour of knighthood, for men of low descent frequently attained it. But it required a distinguished display of personal merit to raise such persons out of the class where they were born, and the honours of Chivalry were, generally speaking, appropriated to those of fair and gentle pa-

rentage. The noble families, therefore, were the source from which Chivalry drew recruits; and it was upon the nobles that the losses, proscriptions, and forfeitures, of the Civil Wars chiefly fell. We have seen, that, in France, their poverty occasioned their yielding up the privilege of military command to the disposal of the crown. In England it was, fortunately, not so much the crown as the commons who rose on the ruins of the feudal Chivalry. But it is well known, that the Civil Wars had so exhausted the English nobility, as to enable Henry VII. to pass his celebrated statutes against those hosts of retainers, which struck, in fact, at the very root of their power. And, thus, Providence, whose ways bring good out of evil, laid the foundation of the future freedom of England in the destruction of what had long been its most constitutional ground of defence, and, in the subjugation of that system of Chivalry, which, having softened the ferocity of a barbarous age, was now to fall into disuse, as too extravagant for an enlightened one.

In fact, it was not merely the changes which had taken place in the constitution of armies and fashion of the fight, nor the degraded and weak state of the nobles, but also, and in a great degree, the more enlightened manners of the times, and the different channels into which enthusiasm and energy were directed, which gradually abolished the sentiments of Chivalry. We have seen, that the abstract principles of Chivalry were, in the highest degree, virtuous and noble, nay, that they failed by carrying to an absurd, exaggerated, and impracticable point, the honourable duties which they inculcated. Such doctrines, when they fail to excite enthusiasm, become exploded as ridiculous. Men's minds were now awakened to other and more important and complicated exercises of the understanding, and were no longer responsive to the subjects which so deeply interested their ancestors of the middle ages. Sciences of various kinds had been rekindled in the course of the sixteenth century; the arts had been awakened in a style of perfection unknown even to classical ages. Above all, religion had become the in-

teresting study of thousands, and the innovating doctrines of the Reformers, while hailed with ecstasy by their followers, rejected as abominations by the Catholics, and debated fiercely by both parties, involved the nobility of Europe in speculations very different from the *arrets* of the Court of Love, and demanded their active service in fields more bloody than those of tilt and tournament. When the historians or disputants on either side allude to the maxims of Chivalry, it is in terms of censure and ridicule. Yet, if we judge by the most distinguished authorities on either side, the Reformers rejected as sinful what the Catholics were contented to brand as absurd. It is with no small advantage to the Huguenots,—to that distinguished party which produced Sully, D'Aubigné, Coligni, Duplessis-Mornay, and La Noue, that we contrast the moral severity with which they pass censure on the books of Chivalry with the licentious flippancy of Brantome, who ridicules the same works, on account of the very virtues which they inculcate. From the books of *Amadis de Gaul*, refining, as he informs us, upon the ancient vanities of Perceforest, Tristan, Giron, &c., La Noue contends the age in which he lived derived the recommendation and practice of incontinence, of the poison of revenge, of neglect of sober and rational duty, desperate bloodthirstiness, under disguise of search after honour, and confusion of public order. "They are the instructions," he says, "of Apollyon, who, being a murderer from the beginning, delighteth wholly in promoting murther." Of the tournaments, he observes, "that such spectacles, rendering habitual the sight of blows and blood, had made the court of France pitiless and cruel." "Let those," he exclaims, "who desire to feed their eyes with blood, imitate the manner of England, where they exercise their cruelty on brute beasts, bringing in bulls and bears to fight with dogs, a practice beyond comparison far more lawful than the justs of Chivalry."*

It is curious to contrast the opinions of La Noue, a

* *Discourses, Political and Military*, translated out of the French of La Noue, 1587.

stern and moral reformer, and a skilful and brave soldier as France ever produced, although condemning all war that did not spring out of absolute necessity, with those of Brantome, a licentious courtier, who mixed the Popish superstitions, which stood him instead of religion, with a leaven of infidelity and blasphemy. From the opinions he has expressed, and from what he has too faithfully handed down as the manners of his court and age, it is plain that all which was valuable in the spirit of Chivalry had been long renounced by the French noblesse. To mark this declension, it is only necessary to run over the various requisites already pointed out as necessary to form the chivalrous character, and contrast them with the opinions held in the end of the sixteenth century, in the court of the descendants of Saint Louis.

The spirit of devotion which the rules of Chivalry inculcated, was so openly disavowed, that it was assigned as a reason for preferring the character of Sir Tristram to that of Sir Lancelot, that the former is described in romance as relying, like Mezentius, upon his own arm alone, whereas Lancelot, on engaging in fight, never failed to commend himself to God and the saints, which, in the more modern opinions of the gallants of France, argued a want of confidence in his own strength and valour.

The devotion with which the ancient knights worshipped the fair sex, was held as old-fashioned and absurd as that which they offered to Heaven. The honour paid to chastity and purity in the German forests, and transferred as a sacred point of duty to the sons of Chivalry, was as little to be found in the court of France, according to Brantome, as the chastity and purity to which it was due. The gross and coarse sensuality which we have seen engrafted upon professions of Platonic sentiment, became finally so predominant, as altogether to discard all marks of sentimental attachment; and from the time of Catharine of Medicis, who trained her maids of honour as courtezans, the manners of the court of France seem to have been inferior in decency to those of a well-regulated bagnio. The sort of re-

spect which these ladies were deemed entitled to, may be conjectured from an anecdote given by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, whose own character was formed upon the chivalrous model which was now become obsolete. As he stood in the trenches before a besieged place, along with Balagny, a celebrated duellist of the period, between whom and Lord Herbert some altercation had formerly occurred, the Frenchman, in a bravade, jumped over the entrenchment, and, daring Herbert to follow him, ran towards the besieged place, in the face of a fire of grape and musketry. Finding that Herbert outran him, and seemed to have no attention of turning back, Balagny was forced to set the example of retreating. Lord Herbert then invited him to an encounter upon the old chivalrous point, which had the fairer and more virtuous mistress; to which proposition Balagny replied by a jest so coarse, as made the Englishman retort, that he spoke like a mean debauchee, not like a cavalier and man of honour. As Balagny was one of the most fashionable gallants of his time, and, as the story shows, ready for the most hair-brained achievements, his declining combat upon the ground of quarrel chosen by Lord Herbert, is a proof how little the former love of Chivalry accorded with the gallantry of these later days.

Bravery, the indispensable requisite of the *preux chevalier*, continued, indeed, to be held in the same estimation as formerly; and the history of the age gave the most brilliant as well as the most desperate examples of it, both in public war and private encounter. But courage was no longer tempered with the good faith and courtesy,—*La bonta dei gli cavalieri antichi*, so celebrated by Ariosto. There no longer existed those generous knights, that one day bound the wounds of a gallant opponent, guided him to a place of refuge, and defended him on the journey, and who, on the next, hesitated not in turn to commit their own safety to the power of a mortal foe, without fear that he would break the faithful word he had pawned for the safety of his enemy. If such examples occur in the civil wars of France, they were dictated by the generosity of indi-

viduals who rose above the vices of their age, and were not demanded, as matters of right, from all who desired to stand well in public opinion. The intercourse with Italy, so fatal to France in many respects, failed not to imbue her nobility with the politics of Machiavel,—the coarse licentiousness of Aretin,—and the barbarous spirit of revenge, which held it wise to seek its gratification, not in fair encounter, but *per ogni modo*—in what manner soever it could be obtained. Duels, when they took place, were no longer fought in the lists, or in presence of judges of the field, but in lonely and sequestered places. Inequality of arms was not regarded, however great the superiority on one side. "Thou hast both a sword and dagger," said Quelus to Antraguet, as they were about to fight, "and I have only a sword."—"The more thy folly," was the answer, "to leave thy dagger at home. We came to fight, not to adjust weapons." The duel accordingly went forward, and Quelus was slain, his left hand (in which he should have had his dagger) being shockingly cut in attempting to parry his antagonist's blows without that weapon. The challenged person having a right to choose his weapons, often endeavoured to devise such as should give him a decidedly unfair advantage. Brantome records with applause the ingenuity of a little man, who, being challenged by a tall Gascon, made choice of a gorget so constructed, that his gigantic adversary could not stoop his neck, so as to aim his blows right. Another had two swords forged of a temper so extremely brittle, that, unless used with particular caution, and in a manner to which he daily exercised himself, the blade must necessarily fly in pieces. Both these ingenious persons killed their man with very little risk or trouble, and no less applause, it would seem, than if they had fought without fraud and covine. The seconds usually engaged, and when one of the combatants was slain, his antagonist did not hesitate to assist his comrade in oppressing by odds him who remained. The *Little French Lawyer* of Fletcher turns entirely on this incident. By a yet more direct mode of murder, a man challenged to a duel was not always sure that his enemy was not to

assassinate him by the assistance of ruffians at the place of rendezvous, of which Brantome gives several instances without much censure. The plighted word of an antagonist by no means ensured against treachery to the party to whom it was given. De Rosne, a gentleman well skilled in the practice and discipline of the wars, receiving a challenge from De Fargy, through the medium of a young man, who offered to pledge his word and faith for the fair conduct of his principal—made an answer which Brantome seems to approve as prudential. "I should be unwilling," he replied, "to trust my life upon a pledge on which I would not lend twenty crowns."

In many cases no ceremony was used, but the nobles assassinated each other without scruple or hesitation. Brantome gives several stories of the Baron des Vitaux, whom he describes as the very mirror of gallantry, known as such not only in France, but in Italy, Spain, Poland, and England, and one whom strangers were desirous to see on account of his renown in arms. Most of this person's acts of gallantry, nevertheless, were mere assassinations, perpetrated by the assistance of his attendants, and especially of two brothers called Boucicault, who were called Vitaux's Lions. The Baron had a quarrel with Monsieur du Gua, and Brantome, the friend of both parties, endeavoured to bring about a reconciliation, but in vain. "Vitaux," says the historian, "had thoughts of challenging his enemy, but did not do so, for certain reasons which I will not here enter into, and because it was not his best and surest course."—He left Paris, therefore, for six months, and returning suddenly, entered into Du Gua's lodgings, leaving two men to guard the door. He found his victim lying on his bed, owing to some indisposition. Du Gua had scarce time to start up and seize a lance, ere Vitaux rushed within his weapon, and with a very sharp and short sword, (which, in such cases, says Brantome, by way of parenthesis, "is more convenient than a long one,") ran him once or twice through the body, and left him wounded to death. This, with similar deeds of atrocity committed by the same ruffian, are termed

Moors of Spain caught the emulation, and had their orders of knighthood as well as the Christians. But, even during this splendid period, various causes were silently operating the future extinction of the flame, which blazed thus wide and brightly.

An important discovery, the invention of gunpowder, had taken place, and was beginning to be used in war, even when Chivalry was in its highest glory. It is said Edward III. had field-pieces at the battle of Cressy, and the use of guns is mentioned even earlier. But the force of gunpowder was long known and used, ere it made any material change in the art of war. The long-bow continued to be the favourite, and it would seem the more formidable missile weapon, for almost two centuries after guns had been used in war. Still every successive improvement was gradually rendering the invention of fire-arms more perfect, and their use more decisive of the fate of battle. In proportion as they came into general use, the suits of defensive armour began to be less generally worn. It was found, that these cumbrous defences, however efficient against lances, swords, and arrows, afforded no effectual protection against these more forcible missiles. The armour of the knight was gradually curtailed to a light head-piece, a cuirass, and the usual defences of men-at-arms. Complete harness was only worn by generals and persons of high rank, and that rather, it would seem, as a point of dignity than for real utility. The young nobility of France, especially, became weary of the unwieldy steel coats in which their ancestors sheathed themselves, and adopted the slender and light armour of the German Reiters, or mercenary cavalry. They also discontinued the use of the lance; in both cases, contrary to the injunctions of Henry IV. and the opinion of Sully. At length, the arms of the cavalry were changed almost in every particular from those which were proper to Chivalry; and as, in such cases, much depends upon outward show and circumstance, the light-armed cavalier, who did not carry the weapons, or practise the exercises of knighthood, laid aside, at the same time, the habits and sentiments peculiar to the order.

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formed by Bayard, that, if the French men-at-arms were employed, they must be supported by those of the Germans, and not by the lance-knechts, because, in the French companies of ordonnance, every soldier was a gentleman. But, in the reign of Charles IX., we find the change natural to such a new order of things, was in complete operation. The king was content to seek, as qualifications for his men-at-arms, personal bravery, strength, and address in the use of weapons, without respect to rank or birth; and, probably, in many instances, men of inferior birth were preferred to fill up the ranks of these regulated bands. Monluc informs us in his *Commentaries*, that he made his first campaign, as an archer, in the Marechal de Foix's company of gens-d'armes: it was "a situation much esteemed in those days, when many nobles served in that capacity. At present, the rank is greatly degenerated." The complaints of the old noblesse, says Mezerai, were not without reason. Mean carabineers, they said, valets and lacqueys, were recruited in companies, which were put on the same footing with the ancient corps of gens-d'armes, whose officers were all barons of high rank, and almost every man-at-arms a gentleman by birth. These complaints, joined with the charge against Catharine of Medicis, that she had, by the creation of twenty-five new members of the order of Saint Michael, rendered its honours as common as the cockle-shells on the sea-shore, serve to show how early the first rude attempt at establishing a standing and professional army operated to the subversion of the ideas and privileges of Chivalry. According to La Noue, it would seem that, in his time, the practice still prevailed of sending youths of good birth to serve as pages in the gens-d'armes; but, from the sort of society with whom they mixed in service of that sort, their natural spirit was rather debased, and rendered vulgar and brutal, than trained to honour and gallantry.

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In fact, it was not merely the changes which had taken place in the constitution of armies and fashion of the fight, nor the degraded and weak state of the nobles, but also, and in a great degree, the more enlightened manners of the times, and the different channels into which enthusiasm and energy were directed, which gradually abolished the sentiments of Chivalry. We have seen, that the abstract principles of Chivalry were, in the highest degree, virtuous and noble, nay, that they failed by carrying to an absurd, exaggerated, and impracticable point, the honourable duties which they inculcated. Such doctrines, when they fail to excite enthusiasm, become exploded as ridiculous. Men's minds were now awakened to other and more important and complicated exercises of the understanding, and were no longer responsive to the subjects which so deeply interested their ancestors of the middle ages. Sciences of various kinds had been rekindled in the course of the sixteenth century; the arts had been awakened in a style of perfection unknown even to classical ages. Above all, religion had become the in-

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stern and moral reformer, and a skilful and brave soldier as France ever produced, although condemning all war that did not spring out of absolute necessity, with those of Brantome, a licentious courtier, who mixed the Popish superstitions, which stood him instead of religion, with a leaven of infidelity and blasphemy. From the opinions he has expressed, and from what he has too faithfully handed down as the manners of his court and age, it is plain that all which was valuable in the spirit of Chivalry had been long renounced by the French noblesse. To mark this declension, it is only necessary to run over the various requisites already pointed out as necessary to form the chivalrous character, and contrast them with the opinions held in the end of the sixteenth century, in the court of the descendants of Saint Louis.

The spirit of devotion which the rules of Chivalry inculcated, was so openly disavowed, that it was assigned as a reason for preferring the character of Sir Tristram to that of Sir Lancelot, that the former is described in romance as relying, like Mezentius, upon his own arm alone, whereas Lancelot, on engaging in fight, never failed to commend himself to God and the saints, which, in the more modern opinions of the gallants of France, argued a want of confidence in his own strength and valour.

The devotion with which the ancient knights worshipped the fair sex, was held as old-fashioned and absurd as that which they offered to Heaven. The honour paid to chastity and purity in the German forests, and transferred as a sacred point of duty to the sons of Chivalry, was as little to be found in the court of France, according to Brantome, as the chastity and purity to which it was due. The gross and coarse sensuality which we have seen engrafted upon professions of Platonic sentiment, became finally so predominant, as altogether to discard all marks of sentimental attachment; and from the time of Catharine of Medicis, who trained her maids of honour as courtezans, the manners of the court of France seem to have been inferior in decency to those of a well-regulated bagnio. The sort of re-

spect which these ladies were deemed entitled to, may be conjectured from an anecdote given by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, whose own character was formed upon the chivalrous model which was now become obsolete. As he stood in the trenches before a besieged place, along with Balagny, a celebrated duellist of the period, between whom and Lord Herbert some altercation had formerly occurred, the Frenchman, in a bravade, jumped over the entrenchment, and, daring Herbert to follow him, ran towards the besieged place, in the face of a fire of grape and musketry. Finding that Herbert outran him, and seemed to have no attention of turning back, Balagny was forced to set the example of retreating. Lord Herbert then invited him to an encounter upon the old chivalrous point, which had the fairer and more virtuous mistress; to which proposition Balagny replied by a jest so coarse, as made the Englishman retort, that he spoke like a mean debauchee, not like a cavalier and man of honour. As Balagny was one of the most fashionable gallants of his time, and, as the story shows, ready for the most hair-brained achievements, his declining combat upon the ground of quarrel chosen by Lord Herbert, is a proof how little the former love of Chivalry accorded with the gallantry of these later days.

Bravery, the indispensable requisite of the *preux chevalier*, continued, indeed, to be held in the same estimation as formerly; and the history of the age gave the most brilliant as well as the most desperate examples of it, both in public war and private encounter. But courage was no longer tempered with the good faith and courtesy,—*La bonta dei gli cavalieri antichi*, so celebrated by Ariosto. There no longer existed those generous knights, that one day bound the wounds of a gallant opponent, guided him to a place of refuge, and defended him on the journey, and who, on the next, hesitated not in turn to commit their own safety to the power of a mortal foe, without fear that he would break the faithful word he had pawned for the safety of his enemy. If such examples occur in the civil wars of France, they were dictated by the generosity of indi-

them; and may be termed either romantic histories, or historical romances, according to the proportion in which their truth is debased by fiction, or their fiction mingled with truth.

A moment's glance at the origin of society will satisfy the reader why this can hardly be otherwise. The father of an isolated family, destined one day to rise into a tribe, and in further progress of time to expand into a nation, may, indeed, narrate to his descendants the circumstances which detached him from the society of his brethren, and drove him to form a solitary settlement in the wilderness, with no other deviation from truth, on the part of the narrator, than arises from the infidelity of memory, or the exaggerations of vanity. But when the tale of the patriarch is related by his children, and again by his descendants of the third and fourth generation, the facts it contains are apt to assume a very different aspect. The vanity of the tribe augments the simple annals from one cause—the love of the marvellous, so natural to the human mind, contributes its means of sophistication from another—while, sometimes, from a third cause, the king and the priest find their interest in casting a holy and sacred gloom and mystery over the early period in which their power arose. And thus altered and sophisticated from so many different motives, the real adventures of the founder of the tribe bear as little proportion to the legend recited among his children, as the famous hut of Loretto bears to the highly ornamented church with which superstition has surrounded and enchased it. Thus the definition which we have given of Romance, as a fictitious narrative turning upon the marvellous or the supernatural, might, in a large sense, be said to embrace

> ——————— quicquid Græcia mendax
> Audet in historia,

or, in fine, the mythological and fabulous history of all early nations.

It is also important to remark, that poetry, or rather verse—rhythm at least of some sort or other, is origi-

nally selected as the best vehicle for these traditional histories. Its principal recommendation is probably the greater facility with which metrical narratives are retained in the memory—a point of the last consequence, until the art of writing is generally introduced; since the construction of the verse itself forms an artificial association with the sense, the one of which seldom fails to recall the other to recollection. But the medium of verse, at first adopted merely to aid the memory, becomes soon valuable on account of its other qualities. The march or measure of the stanza is gratifying to the ear, and, like a natural strain of melody, can be restrained or accelerated, so as to correspond with the tone of feeling which the words convey; while the recurrence of the necessary measure rhythm, or rhyme, is perpetually gratifying the hearer by a sense of difficulty overcome. Verse being thus adopted as the vehicle of traditional history, there needs but the existence of a single man of genius, in order to carry the composition a step higher in the scale of literature than that of which we are treating. In proportion to the skill which he attains in his art, the fancy and ingenuity of the artist himself are excited; the simple narrative transmitted to him by ruder rhymers is increased in length; is decorated with the graces of language, amplified in detail, and rendered interesting by description; until the brief and barren original bears as little resemblance to the finished piece, as the *Iliad* of Homer to the evanescent traditions, out of which the blind bard wove his tale of Troy Divine. Hence the opinion expressed by the ingenious Percy, and assented to by Ritson himself. When about to present to his readers an excellent analysis of the old Romance of *Lybius Disconius*, and making several remarks on the artificial management of the story, the Bishop observes, that "if an Epic poem may be defined a fable related by a poet to excite admiration and inspire virtue, by representing the action of some one hero favoured by Heaven, who executes a great design in spite of all the obstacles that oppose him, I know not why we should withhold

the name of *Epic Poem* from the piece which I am about to analyse."*

Yet although this levelling proposition has been laid down by Percy, and assented to by Ritson (writers who have few opinions in common), and although, upon so general a view of the subject, the *Iliad*, or even the *Odyssey*, of Homer might be degraded into the class of Romances, as *Le Beau Deconnu* is elevated into that of epic poems, there lies in ordinary speech, and in common sense, as wide a distinction between these two classes of composition, as there is betwixt the rude mystery or morality of the middle ages, and the regular drama by which these were succeeded. Where the art and the ornaments of the poet chiefly attract our attention—where each part of the narrative bears a due proportion to the others, and the whole draws gradually towards a final and satisfactory conclusion—where the characters are sketched with force, and sustained with precision—where the narrative is enlivened and adorned with so much, and no more, of poetical ornament and description, as may adorn, without impeding its progress—where this art and taste are displayed, supported, at the same time, by a sufficient tone of genius, and art of composition, the work produced must be termed an Epic Poem, and the author may claim his seat upon the high and honoured throne occupied by Homer, Virgil, and Milton. On the other hand, when a story languishes in tedious and minute details, and relies for the interest which it proposes to excite, rather upon the wild excursions of an unbridled fancy, than upon the skill of the poet—when the supernatural and the extraordinary are relied upon exclusively as the supports of the interest, the author, though his production may be distinguished by occasional flashes of genius, and though it may be interesting to the historian, as containing some minute fragments of real events, and still more so to the antiquary, from the light which it throws upon ancient manners, is still no more than a

* *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, III. xxvii. The Prelate is citing a discourse on Epic Poetry, prefixed to *Telemachus*.

humble romancer, and his works must rank amongst those rude ornaments of a dark age, which are at present the subject of our consideration. Betwixt the extremes of the two classes of composition, there must, no doubt, exist many works, which partake in some degree of the character of both; and after having assigned most of them each to their proper class, according as they are distinguished by regularity of composition and poetical talent, or, on the contrary, by extravagance of imagination, and irregularity of detail, there may still remain some, in which these properties are so equally balanced, that it may be difficult to say to which class they belong. But although this may be the case in a very few instances, our taste and habits readily acknowledge as complete and absolute a difference betwixt the Epopeia and Romance, as can exist betwixt two distinct species of the same generic class.

We have said of Romance, that it first appears in the form of metrical history, professes to be a narrative of real facts, and is, indeed, nearly allied to such history as an early state of society affords; which is always exaggerated by the prejudices and partialities of the tribe to which it belongs, as well as deeply marked by their idolatry and superstition. These it becomes the trade of the romancers still more to exaggerate, until the thread of truth can scarce be discerned in the web of fable which involves it; and we are compelled to renounce all hope of deriving serious or authentic information from the materials upon which the compounders of fiction have been so long at work, from one generation to another, that they have at length obliterated the very shadow of reality or even probability.

The view we have given of the origin of Romance will be found to agree with the facts which the researches of so many active investigators of this curious subject have been able to ascertain. It is found, for example, and we will produce instances in viewing the progress of Romance in particular countries, that the earliest productions of this sort, known to exist, are short narrations or ballads, which were probably sung on solemn or festival occasions, recording the deeds and

praises of some famed champion of the tribe and country, or perhaps the history of some remarkable victory or signal defeat, calculated to interest the audience by the associations which the song awakens. These poems, of which very few can now be supposed to exist, are not without flashes of genius, but brief, rude, and often obscure, from real antiquity or affected sublimity of diction. The song on the battle of Brunanburgh, preserved in the *Saxon Chronicle*, is a genuine and curious example of this aboriginal style of poetry.

Even at this early period,* there may be observed a distinction betwixt what may be called the *Temporal* and *Spiritual* Romances; the first destined to the celebration of worldly glory,—the second to recording the deaths of martyrs and the miracles of saints; both which themes unquestionably met with an almost equally favourable reception from their hearers. But although most nations possess, in their early species of literature, specimens of both kinds of Romance, the proportion of each, as was naturally to have been expected, differs according as the genius of the people amongst whom they occur leaned towards devotion or military enterprise. Thus, of the Saxon specimens of poetry, which manuscripts still afford us, a very large proportion is devotional, amongst which are several examples of the Spiritual Romance, but very few indeed of those respecting warfare or chivalry. On the other hand, the Norman language, though rich in examples of both kinds of Romances, is particularly abundant in that which relates to battle and warlike adventure. The Christian Saxons had become comparatively pacific, while the Normans were certainly accounted the most martial people in Europe.

However different the Spiritual Romance may be from the temporal in scope and tendency, the nature of the two compositions did not otherwise greatly differ. The structure of verse and style of composition was the same; and the induction, even when the most serious

* The religious romances of *Barlaam* and *Jehosaphat* were composed by John of Damascus in the eighth century.

subject was undertaken, exactly resembled that with which minstrels introduced their idle tales, and often contained allusions to them. Warton quotes a poem on the Passions, which begins,

> I hereth one lutele tale, that Ich eu wille telle,
> As wi vyndeth hit invrite in the godspelle,
> Nuz hit nouht of Carlemeyne ne of the Duzpere,
> Ac of Criste's thruurynge, &c.

The Temporal Romances, on the other hand, often commenced by such invocations of the Deity, as would only have been in place when a much more solemn subject was to be agitated. The exordium of the Romance of *Ferumbras* may serve as an example of a custom almost universal:

> God in glorye of mightis moost
> That all things made in sapience,
> By virtue of Word and Holy Gooste,
> Giving to men great excellence, &c.

The distresses and dangers which the knight endured for the sake of obtaining earthly fame and his mistress's favour, the saint or martyr was exposed to for the purpose of securing his rank in heaven, and the favour of some beloved and peculiar patron saint. If the earthly champion is in peril from monsters, dragons, and enchantments, the spiritual hero is represented as liable to the constant assaults of the whole invisible world, headed by the ancient dragon himself. If the knight is succoured at need by some favouring fairy or protecting genius, the saint is under the protection not only of the whole heavenly host, but of some one divine patron or patroness who is his especial auxiliary. Lastly, the conclusion of the Romance, which usually assigns to the champion a fair realm, an abundant succession, and a train of happy years, consigns to the martyr his fane and altar upon earth, and in heaven his seat among saints and angels, and his share in a blessed eternity. It remains but to say, that the style and language of these two classes do not greatly differ, and that the composers of both employ the same structure of rhythm

and of language, and draw their ideas and their incidents from similar sources; so that, having noticed the existence of the Spiritual Romance, it is unnecessary for the present to prosecute this subject any further.

Another early and natural division of these works of fiction seems to have arranged them into *Serious* and *Comical*. The former were by far the most numerous, and examples of the latter are in most countries comparatively rare. Such a class, however, existed, as proper Romances, even if we hold the Comic Romance distinct from the *Contes* and *Fabliaux* of the French, and from such jocular English narratives as the *Wife Lapt in Moril's Skin*, *The Friar and the Boy*, and similar humorous tales: of which the reader will find many examples in Ritson's *Ancient English Poetry*, and in other collections. The scene of these *gestes* being laid in low, or at least in ordinary life, they approach in their nature more nearly to the class of novels, and may perhaps be considered as the earliest specimens of that kind of composition. But the proper Comic Romance was that in which the high terms and knightly adventures of chivalry were burlesqued, by ascribing them to clowns, or others of a low and mean degree. Such compositions formed, as it were, a parody on the Serious Romance, to which they bore the same proportion as the antimasque, studiously filled with grotesque, absurd, and extravagant characters, "entering," as the stage direction usually informs us, "to a confused music," bore to the masque itself, where all was dignified, noble, stately, and harmonious.

An excellent example of the Comic Romance is the *Tournament of Tottenham*, printed in Percy's *Reliques*, in which a number of clowns are introduced practising one of those warlike games, which were the exclusive prerogative of the warlike and noble. They are represented making vows to the swan, the peacock, and the ladies; riding a tilt on their clumsy cart horses, and encountering each other with plough-shares, and flails; while their defensive armour consisted of great wooden bowls and troughs, by way of helmets and cuirasses. The learned editor seems to have thought this singular

composition was, like Don Quixote, with which he compares it, a premeditated effort of satire, written to expose the grave and fantastic manners of the Serious Romance. This is considering the matter too deeply, and ascribing to the author of the *Tournament of Tottenham*, a more critical purpose than he was probably capable of conceiving. It is more natural to suppose that his only ambition was to raise a laugh, by ascribing to the vulgar the manners and exercises of the noble and valiant; as in the well-known farce *High Life Below Stairs*, the ridicule is not directed against the manners described, but against the menials who affect those that are only befitting their superiors.

The *Hunting of the Hare*, published in the collection formed by the late industrious and accurate Mr. Weber, is a comic Romance of the same order. A yeoman informs the inhabitants of a country hamlet that he has found a hare sitting, and enquires if there is any gentleman near who keeps greybounds, for the purpose of coursing her. The villain to whom he communicates this information replies, there is no need of sending for a gentleman's assistance, and proceeds to enumerate the catalogue of ban-dogs, which are the property of himself and the other clowns of the village:

"Hob Andrew Y thynke on now,
He has a dogge wyll take a sow,
And bryng hur to the cowtte;
Ther is no thyng he wyll forsake,
Ye schall se hym this hare take,
And gnaw ate hur throwtte.

"Parkyn the potter, hase iij that wyll not fayll;
Short schonkes and neuer a tayll:
No kalfe so greyt, as Y wene,
So has Dykon and Jac Gryme,
So has yonge Raynall and Sym,
And all the schall hom sene."

When the chase is assembled, the yeoman puts up the hare, who with little difficulty makes her escape from the mongrel mastiffs, and breaks a ring which had been formed by the peasants, armed with their great clubs and bats. Great is the terror of the individual over

whom she ran in her retreat, and who expected fully that she would have torn his throat out. The inexperienced curs and mastiffs, instead of pursuing the game, commence a battle-royal amongst themselves,—their masters take part in the fray, and beat each other soundly. In short, the hunting of the hare, scarce less doleful than that of Cheviot, concludes like the latter, with the women of the village coming to carry off the wounded and slain.

It can hardly be supposed the satire is directed against the sport of hunting itself; since the whole ridicule arises out of the want of the necessary knowledge of its rules, incident to the ignorance and inexperience of the clowns, who undertook to practise an art peculiar to gentlemen.

The ancient poetry of Scotland furnishes several examples of this ludicrous style of romantic composition; as the *Tournament at the Drum*, and the *Justing of Watson and Barbour*, by Sir David Lindsay. It is probable that these mock encounters were sometimes acted in earnest; at least King James I. is accused of witnessing such practical jests; "sometimes presenting David Droman and Archie Armstrong, the King's fool, on the back of other fools, to tilt at one another till they fell together by the ears."—(Sir Antony Weldon's *Court of King James.*)

In hastily noticing the various divisions of the Romance, we have in some degree delayed our promised account of its rise and progress; an enquiry which we mean chiefly to confine to the Romance of the middle ages. It is indeed true that this species of composition is common to almost all nations, and that even if we deem the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* compositions too dignified by the strain of poetry in which they are composed to bear the name of Metrical Romances; yet we have the Pastoral Romance of *Daphnis and Chloe*, and the Historical Romance of *Theagenes and Chariclea*, which are sufficiently accurate specimens of that style of composition. The *Milesian fables* and the Romances of Antonius Diogenes, described by Photius, could they be recovered, would also be found to belong to the same class. It is

impossible to avoid noticing that the Sybarites, whose luxurious habits seem to have been intellectual, as well as sensual, were peculiarly addicted to the perusal of the Milesian fables; from which we may conclude that the narratives were not of that severe kind which inspired high thoughts and martial virtues. But there would be little advantage derived from extending our researches into the ages of classical antiquity respecting a class of compositions, which, though they existed then, as in almost every stage of society, were neither so numerous nor of such high repute as to constitute any considerable portion of that literature.

Want of space also may entitle us to dismiss the consideration of the Oriental Romances, unless in so far as in the course of the middle ages they came to furnish materials for enlarging and varying the character of the Romances of knight-errantry. That they existed early, and were highly esteemed both among the Persians and Arabians, has never been disputed; and the most interesting light has been lately thrown on the subject by the publication of *Antar*, one of the most ancient, as well as most rational, if we may use the phrase, of the Oriental fictions. The Persian Romance of the *Sha-Nameh* is well known to Europeans by name, and by copious extracts; and the love-tale of *Mejnoun and Leilah* is also familiar to our ears, if not to our recollections. Many of the fictions in the extraordinary collection of the *Arabian Tales*, that of Codadad and his brethren, for example, approach strictly to the character of Romances of Chivalry; although in general they must be allowed to exceed the more tame northern fictions in dauntless vivacity of invention, and in their more strong tendency to the marvellous. Several specimens of the Comic Romance are also to be found mingled with those which are serious; and we have the best and most positive authority that the recital of these seductive fictions is at this moment an amusement as fascinating and general among the people of the East, as the perusal of printed Romances and novels among the European public. But a minute investigation into this particular species of Romance would

lead us from our present field, already sufficiently extensive for the limits to which our plan confines it.

The European Romance, wherever it arises, and in whatsoever country it begins to be cultivated, had its origin in some part of the real or fabulous history of that country; and of this we will produce, in the sequel, abundant proofs. But the simple tale of tradition had not passed through many mouths, ere some one, to indulge his own propensity for the wonderful, or to secure by novelty the attention of his audience, augments the meagre chronicle with his own apocryphal inventions. Skirmishes are elevated into great battles; the champion of a remote age is exaggerated into a sort of demi-god; and the enemies whom he encountered and subdued are multiplied in number and magnified in strength, in order to add dignity to his successes against them. Chanted to rhythmical numbers, the songs which celebrate the early valour of the fathers of the tribe become its war-cry in battle, and men march to conflict hymning the praises and the deeds of some real or supposed precursor who had marshalled their fathers in the path of victory. No reader can have forgotten, that, when the decisive battle of Hastings commenced, a Norman minstrel, Taillefer, advanced on horseback before the invading host, and gave the signal for onset, by singing the *Song of Roland*, that renowned nephew of Charlemagne, of whom Romance speaks so much, and history so little; and whose fall, with the chivalry of Charles the Great in the pass of Roncesvalles, has given rise to such clouds of romantic fiction, that its very name has been for ever associated with it. The remarkable passage has been often quoted from the *Brut of Wace*, an Anglo-Norman metrical chronicle.

Taillefer, qui moult bien chantont
Sur un cheval gi tost alont,
Devant le Duc alont chantant
De Karlemaigne et de Rollant,
Et d'Oliver et des vassals,
Qui morurent en Rencevals.

Which may be thus rendered:

Taillefer, who sung both well and loud,
Came mounted on a courser proud;
Before the Duke the minstrel sprung,
And loud of Charles and Roland sung,
Of Oliver and champions mo,
Who died at fatal Roncevaux.

This champion possessed the sleight-of-hand of the juggler, as well as the art of the minstrel. He tossed up his sword in the air, and caught it again as he galloped to the charge, and showed other feats of dexterity. Taillefer slew two Saxon warriors of distinction, and was himself killed by a third. Ritson, with less than his usual severe accuracy, supposed that Taillefer sung some part of a long metrical Romance upon Roland and his history; but the words *chanson*, *cantilena*, and *song*, by which the composition is usually described, seems rather to apply to a brief ballad or national song; which is also more consonant with our ideas of the time and place where it was chanted.

But neither with these romantic and metrical chronicles did the mind long remain satisfied. More details were demanded, and were liberally added by the invention of those who undertook to cater for the public taste in such matters. The same names of kings and champions, which had first caught the national ear, were still retained, in order to secure attention; and the same assertions of authenticity, and affected references to real history, were stoutly made, both in the commencement and in the course of the narrative. Each nation, as will presently be seen, came at length to adopt to itself a cycle of heroes like those of the *Iliad*; a sort of common property to all minstrels who chose to make use of them, under the condition always that the general character ascribed to each individual hero was preserved with some degree of consistency. Thus, in the Romances of *The Round Table*, Gawain is usually represented as courteous; Kay as rude and boastful; Mordred as treacherous; and Sir Launcelot as a true though a sinful lover, and in all other respects a model of chivalry. Amid the Paladins of Charlemagne, whose cycle may be considered as peculiarly the property of

French in opposition to Norman-Anglo Romance, Gan, or Ganelon of Mayence, is always represented as a faithless traitor, engaged in intrigues for the destruction of Christianity; Roland as brave, unsuspicious, devotedly loyal, and somewhat simple in his disposition; Renaud, or Rinaldo, who possessed the frontier fortress, is painted with all the properties of a borderer, valiant, alert, ingenious, rapacious, and unscrupulous. The same conventional distinctions may be traced in the history of the Nibelung, a composition of Scandinavian origin, which has supplied matter for so many Teutonic Romances. Meisteir Hildebrand, Etzel, Theodorick, and the champion Hogan, as well as Chrimhilda and the females introduced, have the same individuality of character, which is ascribed, in Homer's immortal writings, to the wise Ulysses, the brave but relentless Achilles, his more gentle friend Patroclus, Sarpedon the favourite of the gods, and Hector the protector of mankind. It was not permitted to the invention of a Greek poet to make Ajax a dwarf, or Teucer a giant, Thersites a hero, or Diomedes a coward; and it seems to have been under similar restrictions respecting consistency, that the ancient romancers exercised their ingenuity upon the materials supplied them by their predecessors. But, in other respects, the whole store of romantic history and tradition was free to all as a joint stock in trade, on which each had a right to draw as suited his particular purposes. He was at liberty not only to select a hero out of known and established names which had been the theme of others, but to imagine a new personage of his own pure fancy, and combine him with the heroes of Arthur's Table or Charlemagne's Court, in the way which best suited his fancy. He was permitted to exite new wars against those bulwarks of Christendom, invade them with fresh and innumerable hosts of Saracens, reduce them to the last extremity, drive them from their thrones, and lead them into captivity, and again to relieve their persons, and restore their sovereignty, by events and agents totally unknown in their former story.

In the characters thus assigned to the individual per-

sonages of romantic fiction, it is possible there might be some slight foundation in remote tradition, as there were also probably some real grounds for the existence of such persons, and perhaps for a very few of the leading circumstances attributed to them. But these realities only exist as the few grains of wheat in the bushel of chaff, incapable of being winnowed out, or cleared from the mass of fiction with which each new romancer had in his turn overwhelmed them. So that Romance, though certainly deriving its first original from the pure font of History, is supplied, during the course of a very few generations, with so many tributes from the Imagination, that at length the very name comes to be used to distinguish works of pure fiction.

When so popular a department of poetry has atained this decided character, it becomes time to enquire who were the composers of these numerous, lengthened, and once admired narratives which are called Metrical Romances, and from whence they drew their authority. Both these subjects of discussion have been the source of great controversy among antiquarians; a class of men who, be it said with their forgiveness, are apt to be both positive and polemical upon the very points which are least susceptible of proof, and which are least valuable if the truth could be ascertained; and which, therefore, we would gladly have seen handled with more diffidence, and better temper, in proportion to their uncertainty.

The late venerable Dr. Percy, Bishop of Dromore, led the way unwarily to this dire controversy, by ascribing the composition of our ancient heroic songs and metrical legends, in rather too liberal language, to the minstrels, that class of men by whom they were generally recited. This excellent person, to whose memory the lovers of our ancient lyre must always remain so deeply indebted, did not, on publishing his work nearly fifty years ago, see the rigid necessity of observing the utmost and most accurate precision either in his transcripts or his definitions. The study which he wished to introduce was a new one—it was his object to place it before the public in an engaging and interesting form; and, in consideration of his having obtained this important point,

we ought to make every allowance, not only for slight inaccuracies, but for some hasty conclusions, and even exaggerations, with which he was induced to garnish his labour of love. He defined the minstrels, to whose labours he chiefly ascribed the metrical compositions on which he desired to fix the attention of the public, as "an order of men in the middle ages, who subsisted by the arts of poetry and music, and sung to the harp verses composed by themselves or others."* In a very learned and elegant essay upon the text thus announced, the reverend Prelate in a great measure supported the definition which he had laid down; although it may be thought that, in the first editions at least, he has been anxious to view the profession of the minstrels on their fairest and most brilliant side; and to assign to them a higher station in society than a general review of all the passages connected with them will permit us to give to a class of persons, who either lived a vagrant life, dependent on the precarious taste of the public for a hard-earned maintenance, or, at best, were retained as a part of the menial retinue of some haughty baron, and in a great measure identified with his musical band.

The late acute, industrious, and ingenious Mr. Joseph Ritson, whose severe accuracy was connected with an unhappy eagerness and irritability of temper, took advantage of the exaggerations occasionally to be found in the Bishop's *Account of Ancient Minstrelsy*, and assailed him with terms which are anything but courteous. Without finding an excuse, either in the novelty of the studies in which Percy had led the way, or in the vivacity of imagination which he did not himself share, he proceeded to arraign each trivial inaccuracy as a gross fraud, and every deduction which he considered to be erroneous as a wilful untruth, fit to be stigmatized with the broadest appellation by which falsehood can be distinguished. Yet there is so little room for this extreme loss of temper, that, upon a recent perusal of both those ingenious essays, we were surprised to find that the reverend Editor of the *Reliques*, and the accurate Antiquary,

* *Essay on Ancient Minstrels in England*, prefixed to the first volume of Bishop Percy's *Reliques*.

have differed so very little, as, in essential facts, they appear to have done. Quotations are, indeed, made by both with no sparing hand; and hot arguments, and, on one side at least, hard words, are unsparingly employed; while, as is said to happen in theological polemics, the contest grows warmer, in proportion as the ground concerning which it is carried on is narrower and more insignificant. But notwithstanding all this ardour of controversy, their systems in reality do not essentially differ.

Ritson is chiefly offended at the sweeping conclusion, in which Percy states the minstrels as subsisting by the arts of poetry and music, and reciting to the harp verses composed by themselves and others. He shows very successfully that this definition is considerably too extensive, and that the term minstrel comprehended, of old, not merely those who recited to the harp or other instrument romances and ballads, but others who were distinguished by their skill in instrumental music only; and, moreover, that jugglers, sleight-of-hand performers, dancers, tumblers, and such like subordinate artists, who were introduced to help away the tedious hours in an ancient feudal castle, were also comprehended under the general term of minstrel. But although he distinctly proves that Percy's definition applied only to one class of the persons termed minstrels, those namely who sung or recited verses, and in many cases of their own composition; the bishop's position remains unassailable, in so far as relates to one general class, and those the most distinguished during the middle ages. All minstrels did not use the harp, and recite or compose romantic poetry; but it cannot be denied that such was the occupation of the most eminent of the order. This Ritson has rather admitted than denied; and the number of quotations which his industry has brought together, rendered such an admission inevitable.

Indeed, the slightest acquaintance with ancient Romances of the metrical class, shows us that they were composed for the express purpose of being recited, or, more properly, chanted, to some simple tune or cadence for the amusement of a large audience. Our ancestors, as they were circumscribed in knowledge, were also

more limited in conversational powers than their enlightened descendants; and it seems probable, that, in their public festivals, there was great advantage found in the presence of a minstrel, who should recite some popular composition on their favourite subjects of love and war, to prevent those pauses of discourse which sometimes fall heavily on a company, even of the present accomplished age, and to supply an agreeable train of ideas to those guests who had few of their own. It is, therefore, almost constantly insinuated, that the Romance was to be chanted or recited to a large and festive society, and in some part or other of the piece, generally at the opening, there is a request of attention on the part of the performer; and hence, the perpetual "Lythe and listen, lordings free," which in those, or equivalent words, forms the introduction to so many Romances. As, for example, in the old poem of *Guy and Colbrand*, the minstrel speaks of his own occupation:

"When meat and drink is great plentye,
Then lords and ladyes still will be,
And sit and solace lythe.
Then it is time for mee to speake,
Of kern knights and kempes greate,
Such carping for to kythe."

Chaucer, also, in his Ryme of Sir Thopas, assigns to the minstrels of his hero's household the same duty, of reciting Romances of spiritual or secular heroes, for the good knight's pastime while arming for battle:

"Do cum," he sayd, "my minestrales,
And jestours for to tellen tales.
Anon in min arming,
Of romaunces that ben reales,
Of popes and of cardinales,
And eke of love-longing."

Not to multiply quotations, we will only add one of some importance, which must have escaped Ritson's researches; for his editorial integrity was such, as rendered him incapable of suppressing evidence on either side of the question. In the old Romance or legend of *True Thomas and the Queen of Elfland*, Thomas the Rhymer, him-

self a minstrel, is gifted by the Queen of the Faery with the faculties of music and song. The answer of Thomas is not only conclusive as to the minstrel's custom of recitation, but shows that it was esteemed the highest branch of his profession, and superior as such to mere instrumental music:

> "To harp and carp, Thomas, wheresoever ye gon,
> Thomas take the these with the"——
> "Harping," he said, "ken I non,
> For tong is chefe of Mynstralse."*

We, therefore, arrive at the legitimate conclusion, that although, under the general term minstrels, were comprehended many who probably entertained the public only with instrumental performances, with ribald tales, with jugglery, or farcical representations, yet one class amongst them, and that a numerous one, made poetical recitations their chief, if not their exclusive occupation. The memory of these men was, in the general case, the depository of the pieces which they recited; and hence, although a number of their Romances still survive, very many more have doubtless fallen into oblivion.

That the minstrels were also the authors of many of these poems, and that they altered and enlarged others, is a matter which can scarce be doubted, when it is proved that they were the ordinary reciters of them. It was as natural for a minstrel to become a poet or composer of Romances, as for a player to be a dramatic author, or a musician a composer of music. Whatsoever individual among a class, whose trade it was to recite poetry, felt the least degree of poetical enthusiasm in a profession so peculiarly calculated to inspire it, must, from that very impulse, have become an original author, or translator at least: thus giving novelty to his recitations, and acquiring additional profit and fame.—Bishop Percy, therefore, states the case fairly in the following passage:—"It can hardly be expected, that we should be able to produce regular and unbroken annals of the minstrel art and its professors, or have suffi-

* Jamieson's *Popular Ballads*, vol. II. p. 27.

cient information, whether every minstrel or bard composed himself, or only repeated, the songs he chanted. Some probably did the one, and some the other; and it would have been wonderful, indeed, if men, whose peculiar profession it was, and who devoted their time and talents to entertain their hearers with poetical compositions, were peculiarly deprived of all poetical genius themselves, and had been under a physical incapacity of composing those common popular rhymes, which were the usual subjects of their recitation."* While, however, we acquiesce in the proposition, that the minstrels composed many, perhaps the greater part, of the metrical Romances which they sung, it is evident they were frequently assisted in the task by others, who, though not belonging to this profession, were prompted by leisure and inclination to enter upon the literary or poetical department as amateurs. These very often belonged to the clerical profession, amongst whom relaxation of discipline, abundance of spare time, and impatience of the routine of ceremonious duties, often led individuals into worse occupations than the listening to or composing metrical Romances. It was in vain that both the poems and the minstrels who recited them were, by statute, debarred from entering the more rigid monasteries. Both found their way frequently to the refectory, and were made more welcome than brethren of their own profession; as we may learn from a memorable *Gest*, in which two poor travelling priests, who had been received into a monastery with acclamation, under the mistaken idea of their being minstrels, are turned out in disgrace, when it is discovered that they were indeed capable of furnishing spiritual instruction,

* *Essay on the Ancient Minstrels*, p. 30.

Another authority of ancient date, the *Chronicle* of Bertrand Guesclin, distinctly attributes the most renowned Romances to the composition of the minstrels by whom they were sung. As the passage will be afterwards more fully quoted, we must here only say, that after enumerating Arthur, Lancelot, Godfrey, Roland, and other champions, he sums up his account of them as being the heroes

"De quoi cils minestriers font les nobles romans."

but understood none of the entertaining arts with which the hospitality of their hosts might have been repaid by itinerant bards.

Nay, besides a truant disposition to a forbidden task, many of the grave authors may have alleged, in their own defence, that the connexion between history and Romance was not in their day entirely dissolved. Some eminent men exercised themselves in both kinds of composition; as, for example, Maitre Wace, a canon of Caen, in Normandy, who, besides the metrical chronicle of *La Brut*, containing the earliest history of England, and other historical legends, wrote in 1155, the *Roman de Chevalier de Lyon*, probably the same translated under the title of *Ywain and Gawain*. Lambert li Cors, and Benoit de Saint-Maur, seem both to have been of the clerical order; and, perhaps, Chretien de Troyes, a most voluminous author of Romance, was of the same profession. Indeed, the extreme length of many Romances being much greater than any minstrel could undertake to sing at one or even many sittings, may induce us to refer them to men of a more sedentary occupation than those wandering poets. The religious Romances were, in all probability, the works of such churchmen as might wish to reconcile an agreeable occupation with their religious profession. All which circumstances must be received as exceptions from the general proposition, that the Romances in metre were the compositions of the minstrels by whom they were recited or sung, though they must still leave Percy's proposition to a certain extent unimpeached.

To explain the history of Romance, it is necessary to digress a little further concerning the condition of the minstrels by whom these compositions were often made, and, generally speaking, preserved and recited. And here it must be confessed, that the venerable Prelate has, perhaps, suffered his love of antiquity, and his desire to ennoble the productions of the middle ages, a little to overcolour the importance and respectability of the minstrel tribe; although his opponent Ritson has, on the other hand, seized on all circumstances and inferences which could be adduced to prove the degradation

of the minstrel character, without attending to the particulars by which these depreciating circumstances were qualified. In fact, neither of these excellent antiquarians has cast a general or philosophic glance on the necessary condition of a set of men, who were by profession the instruments of the pleasure of others during a period of society such as was presented in the middle ages.

In a very early period of civilization, ere the division of ranks has been generally adopted, and while each tribe may be yet considered as one great family, and the nation as a union of such independent tribes, the poetical art, so nearly allied to that of oratory or persuasion, is found to ascertain to its professors a very high rank. Poets are, then, the historians and often the priests of the society. Their command of language, then in its infancy, excites not merely pleasure, but enthusiasm and admiration. When separated into a distinct class, as was the case with the Celtic Bards, and, perhaps, with the Skalds of Scandinavia, they rank high in the scale of society, and we not only find kings and nobles listening to them with admiration, but emulous of their art, and desirous to be enrolled among their numbers. Several of the most renowned northern kings and champions valued themselves as much upon their powers of poetry as on their martial exploits; and of the Welsh princes, the Irish kings, and the Highland chiefs of Scotland, very many practised the arts of poetry and music. Llwarch Hen was a prince of the Cymraig,—Brian Boromhe, a harper and a musician,—and, without resorting to the questionable authenticity of Ossian, several instances of the same kind might be produced in the Highlands.

But, in process of time, when the classes of society come to assume their usual gradation with respect to each other, the rank of professional poets is uniformly found to sink gradually in the scale, along with that of all others whose trade it is to contribute to mere amusement. The professional poet, like the player or the musician, becomes the companion and soother only of idle and convivial hours; his presence would be un-

becoming on occasions of gravity and importance; and his art is accounted at best an amusing but useless luxury. Although the intellectual pleasure derived from poetry, or from the exhibition of the drama, be of a different and much higher class than that derived from the accordance of sounds, or from the exhibition of feats of dexterity, still it will be found, that the opinions and often the laws of society, while individuals of these classes are cherished and held in the highest estimation, have degraded the professions themselves among its idle, dissolute, and useless appendages. Although it may be accounted ungrateful in mankind thus to reward the instruments of their highest enjoyments, yet some justification is usually to be drawn from the manners of the classes who were thus lowered in public opinion. It must be remembered, that, as professors of this joyous science, as it was called, the minstrels stood in direct opposition to the more severe part of the Catholics, and to the monks in particular, whose vows bound them to practise virtues of the ascetic order, and to look upon every thing as profane which was connected with mere worldly pleasure. The manners of the minstrels themselves gave but too much room for clerical censure. They were the usual assistants at scenes, not merely of conviviality, but of license; and, as the companions and encouragers of revelling and excess, they became contemptible in the eyes, not only of the aged and the serious, but of the libertine himself, when his debauch palled on his recollection. The minstrels, no doubt, like their brethren of the stage, sought an apology in the corrupted taste and manners of their audience, with which they were obliged to comply, under the true but melancholy condition, that

> ——they who live to please must please to live.

But this very necessity, rendered more degrading by their increasing numbers and decreasing reputation, only accelerated the total downfall of their order, and the general discredit and neglect into which they had

fallen. The statute of the 39th of Queen Elizabeth, passed at the close of the sixteenth century, ranks those dishonoured sons of song among rogues and vagabonds, and appoints them to be punished as such; and the occupation, though a vestige of it was long retained in the habits of travelling ballad-singers and musicians, sunk into total neglect and contempt. Of this we shall have to speak hereafter; our business being at present with those Romances, which, while still in the zenith of their reputation, were the means by which the minstrels, at least the better and higher class among them, recommended themselves to the favour of their noble patrons, and of the audiences whom they addressed.

It may be presumed, that, although the class of minstrels, like all who merely depend upon gratifying the public, carried in their very occupation the evils which first infected, and finally altogether depraved, their reputation; yet, in the earlier ages, their duties were more honourably estimated, and some attempts were made to introduce into their motley body the character of a regular establishment, subjected to discipline and subordination. Several individuals, both of France and England, bore the title of King of Minstrels, and were invested probably with some authority over the others. The Serjeant of Minstrels is also mentioned; and Edward IV. seems to have attempted to form a Guild or exclusive Corporation of Minstrels. John of Gaunt, at an earlier period, established (between jest and earnest, perhaps) a Court Baron of Minstrels, to be held at Tilbury. There is no reason, however, to suppose, that the influence of their establishments went far in restraining the license of a body of artists so unruly as well as numerous.

It is not, indeed, surprising that individuals, whose talents in the arts of music, or of the stage, rise to the highest order, should, in a special degree, attain the regard and affection of the powerful, acquire wealth, and rise to consideration; for, in such professions, very high prizes are assigned only to pre-eminent excellence; while ordinary or inferior practisers of the same art may be said to draw in the lottery something worse

than a mere blank. In the useful arts, a great equality subsists among the members, and it is wealth alone which distinguishes a tradesman or a mechanic from the brethren of his guild; in other points their respectability is equal. The worst weaver in the craft is still a weaver, and the best, to all but those who buy his web, is little more—as men they are entirely on a level. In what are called the fine arts, it is different; for excellence leads to the highest point of consideration; mediocrity, and marked inferiority, are the object of neglect and utter contempt. Garrick, in his chariot, and whose company was courted for his wit and talent, was, after all, by profession, the same with the unfortunate stroller, whom the British laws condemn as a vagabond, and to whose dead body other countries refuse even the last rites of Christianity. In the same manner it is easy to suppose, that when, in compliance with the taste of their age, monarchs entertained their domestic minstrels,* those persons might be admitted to the most flattering intimacy with their royal masters; sleep within the royal chamber,† amass considerable fortunes, found hospitals,‡ and receive rewards singularly overproportioned to the perquisites of the graver professions ;§ and even practise, in company with their royal masters, the pleasing arts of poetry and music, which all are so desirous of attaining ;‖ whilst, at the same

* Berdic (*Regis Joculator*), the jongleur or minstrel of William the Conqueror, had, as appears from the Domesday record, three vills and five caracates of land in Gloucestershire without rent. Henry I. had a minstrel called Galfrid who received an annuity from the Abbey of Hide.

† A minstrel of Edward I., during that prince's expedition to the Holy Land, slept within his tent, and came to his assistance when an attempt was made to assassinate him.

‡ The Priory and Hospital of Saint Bartholomew, in London, was founded in the reign of Henry I. by Royer, or Raher, a minstrel of that prince.

§ In 1441, the monks of Maxlock, near Coventry, paid a donation of four shillings to the minstrels of Lord Clinton for songs, harping, and other exhibitions, while, to a doctor who preached before the community in the same year, they assigned only sixpence.

‖ The noted anecdote of Blondel and his royal master, Richard Cœur de Lion, will occur to every reader.

time, those who ranked lower in the same profession were struggling with difficulty to gain a precarious subsistence, and many, of a rank still more subordinate, were incurring all the disgrace usually attached to a vagabond life and a dubious character. In the fine arts, we repeat, excellence is demanded, and mere mediocrity is held contemptible; and, while the favour with which the former is loaded, sometimes seems disproportioned to the utility of the art itself, nothing can exceed the scorn poured out on those who expose themselves by undertaking arts which they are unable to practise with success; and it follows, that as excellence can only be the property of a few individuals, the profession in general must be regarded as a degraded one, though these gifted persons are allowed to pass as eminent exceptions to the general rule. Self-conceit, however, love of an idle life, and a variety of combined motives, never fail to recruit the lower orders of such idle professions with individuals, by whose performances, and often by their private characters, the art which they have rashly adopted is discredited, without any corresponding advantage to themselves. It is not, therefore, surprising, that while such distinguished examples of the contrary appeared amongst individuals, the whole body of minstrels, with the Romances which they composed and sung, should be reprobated by graver historians in such severe terms as often occur in the monkish chronicles of the day.

Respecting the style of their composition, Du Cange informs us, that the minstrels sometimes devoted their strains to flatter the great, and sing the praises of those Princes by whom they were protected; while he owns, at the same time, that they often recommended to their hearers the path of virtue and nobleness, and pointed out the pursuits by which the heroes of Romance had rendered themselves renowned in song.* He quotes

* Ministelli dicti præsertim Scurræ, mimi, joculatores, quos etiamnum vulgo *Menestreux* vel *Menestriers*, appellamus.—Porro ejusmodi scurrarum erat Principes non suis duntaxat ludicris oblectare, sed et eorum aures variis avorum, adeoque ipsorum Principum laudibus, non sine assentatione, cum cantilenis et musicis instru-

from the Romance of *Bertrand Guesclin*, the injunction on those who would rise to fame in arms to copy the valiant acts of the Paladins of Charles, and the Knights of the Round Table, narrated in Romances; and it cannot be denied, that those high tales, in which the virtues of generosity, bravery, devotion to his mistress, and zeal for the Catholic religion, were carried to the greatest height of romantic perfection in the character of the hero, united with the scenes passing around them, were of the utmost importance in affecting the character of the age. The fabulous knights of Romance were so completely identified with those of real history, that graver historians quote the actions of the former in illustration of, and as a corollary to, the real events which they narrate.* The virtues recommended in Romance were, however, only of that overstrained and extravagant cast which consisted with the spirit of chivalry. Great bodily strength, and perfection in all martial exercises, was the universal accomplishment inalienable from the character of the hero, and which each romancer had it in his power to confer. It was also easily in the composer's power to devise dangers, and

mentis, demulcere.—Interdum etiam virorum insignium et heroum gesta, aut explicata et jucunda narratione commemorabant, aut suavi vocis inflectione, fidibusque decantabant, quo sic dominorum, cæterorumque qui his intererant ludicris, nobilium animos ad virtutem capessendam et summorum virorum imitationem accenderent: quod fuit olim apud Gallos Bardorum ministerium, ut auctor est Tacitus. Neque enim alios à *Ministellis*, veterum Gallorum *Bardos* fuisse pluribus probat Henricus Valesius ad 15. Ammiani.—*Chronicon* Bertrandi Guesclini:

Qui veut avoir renom des bons et des vaillans
Il doit aler souvent à la pluie et au champ,
Et estre en la bataille, ainsy que fu Rollans,
Les quatre fils Haimon et Charlon li plus grans,
Li Dus Lions de Bourges, et Guion de Connans,
Perceval li Galois, Lancelot et Tristans,
Alexandres, Artus, Godefroy li sachans,
De quoy cils Menestriers font les nobles Romans.

* Barbour, the Scottish historian, censures a Highland chief, when, in commending the prowess of Bruce in battle, he likened him to the Celtic hero, Fin Mac Coul, and says, he might in more mannerly fashion have compared him to Gaudifer, a champion celebrated in the Romance of Alexander.

to free his hero from them by the exertion of valour equally extravagant. But it was more difficult to frame a story which should illustrate the manners as well as the feats of Chivalry; or to devise the means of evincing that devotion to duty, and that disinterested desire to sacrifice all to faith and honour;—that noble spirit of achievement which laboured for others more than itself —which form, perhaps, the fairest side of the system under which the noble youths of the middle ages were trained up. The sentiments of Chivalry, as we have explained in our article on that subject, were founded on the most pure and honourable principles, but unfortunately carried into hyperbole and extravagance; until the religion of its professors approached to fanaticism, their valour to frenzy, their ideas of honour to absurdity, their spirit of enterprise to extravagance, and their respect for the female sex to a sort of idolatry. All those extravagant feelings, which really existed in the society of the middle ages, were magnified and exaggerated by the writers and reciters of Romance; and these, given as resemblances of actual manners, became, in their turn, the glass by which the youth of the age dressed themselves; while the spirit of Chivalry and of Romance thus gradually threw light upon and enhanced each other.

The Romances, therefore, exhibited the same system of manners which existed in the nobles of the age. The character of a true son of chivalry was raised to such a pitch of ideal and impossible perfection, that those who emulated such renown were usually contented to stop far short of the mark. The most adventurous and unshaken valour, a mind capable of the highest flights of romantic generosity, a heart which was devoted to the will of some fair idol, on whom his deeds were to reflect glory, and whose love was to reward all his toils,—these were attributes which all aspired to exhibit who sought to rank high in the annals of chivalry; and such were the virtues which the minstrels celebrated. But, like the temper of a tamed lion, the fierce and dissolute spirit of the age often showed itself through the fair varnish of this artificial system of manners. The valour of the

hero was often stained by acts of cruelty, or freaks of rash desperation; his courtesy and munificence became solemn foppery and wild profusion; his love to his lady often demanded and received a requital inconsistent with the honour of the object; and those who affected to found their attachment on the purest and most delicate metaphysical principles, carried on their actual intercourse with a license altogether inconsistent with their sublime pretensions. Such were the real manners of the middle ages, and we find them so depicted in these ancient legends.

So high was the national excitation in consequence of the romantic atmosphere in which they seemed to breathe, that the knights and squires of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries imitated the wildest and most extravagant emprises of the heroes of Romance; and, like them, took on themselves the most extraordinary adventures, to show their own gallantry, and do most honour to the ladies of their hearts. The females of rank, erected into a species of goddesses in public, and often degraded as much below their proper dignity in more private intercourse, equalled in their extravagances the youth of the other sex. A singular picture is given by Knyghton of the damsels-errant who attended upon the solemn festivals of chivalry, in quest, it may reasonably be supposed, of such adventures as are very likely to be met with by such females as think proper to seek them. "These tournaments are attended by many ladies of the first rank and greatest beauty, but not always of the most untainted reputation. These ladies are dressed in party-coloured tunics, one-half of one colour, and the other half of another; their lirripipes, or tippets, are very short; their caps remarkably little, and wrapt about their heads with cords; their girdles and pouches are ornamented with gold and silver; and they wear short swords, called *daggers*, before them, a little below their navels; they are mounted on the finest horses, with the richest furniture. Thus equipped, they ride from place to place in quest of tournaments, by which they dissipate their fortunes, and sometimes ruin their repu-

tation."—(Knyghton, quoted in Henry's *History*, vol. VIII. p. 402.)

The minstrels, or those who aided them in the composition of the Romances, which it was their profession to recite, roused to rivalry by the unceasing demand for their compositions, endeavoured emulously to render them more attractive by subjects of new and varied interest, or by marvellous incidents which their predecessors were strangers to. Much labour has been bestowed, somewhat unprofitably, in endeavouring to ascertain the sources from which they drew the embellishments of their tales, when the hearers began to be tired of the unvaried recital of battle and tournament which had satisfied the simplicity of a former age. Percy has contended for the Northern *Sagas* as the unquestionable origin of the Romance of the middle ages; Warton conceived that the *Oriental fables*, borrowed by those minstrels who visited Spain, or who in great numbers attended the crusades, gave the principal distinctive colouring to those remarkable compositions; and a later system, patronised by later authors, has derived them, in a great measure, from the *Fragments of Classical Superstition*, which continued to be preserved after the fall of the Roman Empire. All those systems seem to be inaccurate, in so far as they have been adopted, exclusively of each other, and of the general proposition, That fables of a nature similar to the Romances of Chivalry, modified according to manners and state of society, must necessarily be invented in every part of the world, for the same reason that grass grows upon the surface of the soil in every climate and in every country. "In reality," says Mr. Southey, who has treated this subject with his usual ability, "mythological and romantic tales are current among all savages of whom we have any full account; for man has his intellectual as well as his bodily appetites, and these things are the food of his imagination and faith. They are found wherever there is language and discourse of reason, in other words, wherever there is man. And in similar stages of civilization, or states of society, the fictions of

different people will bear a corresponding resemblance, notwithstanding the difference of time and scene."*

To this it may be added, that the usual appearances and productions of nature offer to the fancy, in every part of the world, the same means of diversifying fictitious narrative by the introduction of prodigies. If in any Romance we encounter the description of an elephant, we may reasonably conclude that a phenomenon, unknown in Europe, must have been borrowed from the east; but whosoever has seen a serpent and a bird, may easily aggravate the terrors of the former by conferring on a fictitious monster the wings of the latter; and whoever has seen or heard of a wolf, or lion, and an eagle, may, by a similar exertion of invention, imagine a griffin or hippogriff. It is imputing great poverty to the human imagination, to suppose that the *speciosa miracula*, which are found to exist in different parts of the world, must necessarily be derived from some common source; and perhaps we should not err more grossly in supposing, that the various kinds of boats, skiffs, and rafts, upon which men have dared the ocean on so many various shores, have been all originally derived from the vessel of the Argonauts.

On the other hand, there are various romantic incidents and inventions of a nature so peculiar, that we may boldly, and at once, refer them to some particular and special origin. The tale of *Flora and Blanchefleur*, for example, could only be invented in the east, where the scene is laid, and the manners of which are observed with some accuracy. That of *Orfeo and Herodis*, on the contrary, is the classical history of Orpheus and Euridice, with the Gothic machinery of the Elves or Fairies, substituted for the infernal regions. But notwithstanding these and many other instances, in which the subjects or leading incidents of Romance can be distinctly traced to British or Armorican traditions, to the tales and history of Classic Antiquity, to the wild fables and rich imagery of Arabia, or to those darker and stern-

* Preface to Southey's edition of the *Morte D'Arthur*, vol. II. Lond. 1817.

er themes which were first treated of by the Skalds of the north, it would be assuming greatly too much upon such grounds, to ascribe the derivation of romantic fiction, exclusively to any one of these sources. In fact, the foundation of these fables lies deep in human nature, and the superstructures have been imitated from various authorities by those who, living by the pleasure which their lays of chivalry afforded to their audience, were especially anxious to recommend them by novelty of every kind; and were undoubtedly highly gratified when the report of travellers, or pilgrims, or perhaps their own intercourse with minstrels of other nations, enabled them to vary their usual narrations with circumstances yet unheard in bower and hall. Romance, therefore, was like a compound metal, derived from various mines, and in the different specimens of which one metal or other was alternately predominant; and viewed in this light, the ingenious theories of those learned antiquaries, who have endeavoured to seek the origin of this style of fiction in one of these sources alone, to the exclusion of all others, seem as vain as that of travellers affecting to trace the proper head of the Nile to various different springs, all of which are allowed to be accessary to form the full majesty of his current.

As the fashion of all things passes away, the Metrical Romances began gradually to decline in public estimation, probably on account of the depreciated character of the minstrels by whom they were recited. Tradition, says Ritson, is an alchemy, which converts gold into lead; and there is little doubt, that, in passing from mouth to mouth, and from age to age, the most approved Metrical Romances became gradually corrupted by the defect of memory of some reciters and the interpolations of others; since few comparatively can be supposed to have had recourse to the manuscripts in which some have been preserved. Neither were the reciters in the latter, as in the former times, supplied with new productions of interest and merit. The composition of the Metrical Romance was gradually abandoned to persons of an inferior class. The art of stringing together in loose verse a number of unconnected adventures, was too easy

not to be practised by many who only succeeded to such a degree as was discreditable to the art, by showing that mere mediocrity was sufficient to exercise it. And the licentious character, as well as the great number of those who, under the various names of glee-men, minstrels, and the like, traversed the country, and subsisted by this idle trade, brought themselves and their occupation into still greater contempt and disregard. With them, the long recitations formerly made at the tables of the great, were gradually banished into more vulgar society.

But though the form of those narratives underwent a change of fashion, the appetite for the fictions themselves continued as ardent as ever; and the Prose Romances which succeeded, and finally superseded those composed in verse, had a large and permanent share of popularity. This was, no doubt, in a great degree owing to the important invention of printing, which has so much contributed to alter the destinies of the world. The Metrical Romances, though in some instances sent to the press, were not very fit to be published in this form. The dull amplifications which passed well enough in the course of a half-heard recitation, became intolerable when subjected to the eye; and the public taste gradually growing more fastidious as the language became more copious, and the system of manners more complicated, graces of style and variety of sentiment were demanded instead of a naked and unadorned tale of wonders. The authors of the Prose Romance endeavoured, to the best of their skill, to satisfy this newly awakened and more refined taste. They used, indeed, the same sources of romantic history which had been resorted to by their metrical predecessors; and Arthur, Charlemagne, and all their chivalry, were as much celebrated in prose as ever they had been in poetic narrative. But the new candidates for public favour pretended to have recourse to sources of authentic information, to which their metrical predecessors had no access. They refer almost always to Latin and sometimes to Greek originals, which certainly had no existence; and there is little doubt that the venerable names of the alleged au-

thors are invented, as well as the supposed originals from which they are said to have translated their narratives. The following account of the discovery of *La tres elegante delicieux melliflue et tres plaisante Hystoire du tres noble Roy Perceforest* (printed at Paris in 1528 by Galliot du Pré), may serve to show that modern authors were not the first who invented the popular mode of introducing their works to the world as the contents of a newly-discovered manuscript. In the abridgment to which we are limited, we can give but a faint picture of the minuteness with which the author announces his pretended discovery, and which forms an admirable example of the lie with a circumstance. In the year 1286, Count William of Hainault had, it is averred, crossed the seas in order to be present at the nuptials of Edward, and in the course of a tour through Britain, was hospitably entertained at an abbey situated on the banks of the Humber, and termed, it seems, Burtimer, because founded by a certain Burtimericus, a monarch of whom our annals are silent, but who had gained, in that place, a victory over the heathens of Germany. Here a cabinet, which was enclosed in a private recess, had been lately discovered within the massive walls of an ancient tower, and was found to contain a Grecian manuscript, along with a royal crown. The abbot had sent the latter to King Edward, and the Count of Hainault with difficulty obtained possession of the manuscript. He had it rendered from Greek into Latin by a monk of the abbey of Saint Landelain, and from that language it is said to have been translated into French by the author, who gives it to the world in honour of the Blessed Virgin, and for the edification of nobleness and chivalry.

By such details, the authors of the Prose Romances endeavoured to obtain for their works a credit for authenticity which had been denied to the rhythmical legends. But in this particular they did great injustice to their contemned predecessors, whose reputations they murdered in order to rob them with impunity. Whatever fragments or shadowings of true history may yet remain hidden under the mass of accumulated fable, which had been heaped on them during successive ages,

must undoubtedly be sought in the Metrical Romances; and according to the view of the subject which we have already given, the more the works approach in point of antiquity to the period where the story is laid, the more are we likely to find those historical traditions in something approaching to an authentic state. But those who wrote under the imaginary names of Rusticien de Puise, Robert de Borron, and the like, usually seized upon the subject of some old minstrel; and, recomposing the whole narrative after their own fashion, with additional characters and adventurers, totally obliterated in that operation any shades which remained of the first, and probably authentic tradition, which was the original source of the elaborate fiction. Amplification was especially employed by the prose romancers, who, having once got hold of a subject, seem never to have parted with it until their power of invention was completely exhausted. The Metrical Romances, in some instances, indeed, ran to great length, but were much exceeded in that particular by the folios which were written on the same or similar topics by their prose successors. Probably the latter judiciously reflected, that a book which addresses itself only to the eyes, may be laid aside when it becomes tiresome to the reader; whereas it may not always have been so easy to stop the minstrel in the full career of his metrical declamation.

Who, then, the reader may be disposed to enquire, can have been the real authors of those prolix works, who, shrouding themselves under borrowed names, derived no renown from their labours, if successful, and who, certainly, in the infant state of the press, were not rewarded with any emolument? This question cannot, perhaps, be very satisfactorily answered; but we may reasonably suspect that the long hours of leisure which the cloister permitted to its votaries, were often passed away in this manner; and the conjecture is rendered more probable, when it is observed that matters are introduced into those works which have an especial connexion with sacred history, and with the traditions of the church. Thus, in the curious Romance of *Huon*

de Bourdeaux, a sort of second part is added to that delightful history, in which the hero visits the terrestrial paradise, encounters the first murderer Cain, in the performance of his penance, with more matter to the same purpose, not likely to occur to the imagination of a layman; besides that the laity of the period were, in general, too busy and too ignorant to engage in literary tasks of any kind. The mystical portion of the Romance of the *Round Table* seems derived from the same source. It may also be mentioned, that the audacious and sometimes blasphemous assertions, which claimed for these fictions the credit due even to the inspired writings themselves, were likely to originate amongst Roman Catholic churchmen, who were but too familiar with such forgeries for the purpose of authenticating the legends of their superstition. One almost incredible instance of this impious species of imposture occurs in the history of the *Saint Graal*, which curious mixture of mysticism and chivalry is ascribed by the unfearing and unblushing writer to the Second Person of the Trinity.

Churchmen, however, were by no means the only authors of these legends, although the *Sires Clercs*, as they were sometimes termed, who were accounted the chronicles of the times in which they lived, were usually in orders; and although it appears that it was upon them that the commands of the sovereigns whom they served often imposed the task of producing new Romances, under the usual disguise of ancient chronicles translated from the learned languages, or otherwise collected from the ruins of antiquity. As education became improved, and knowledge began to be more generally diffused, individuals among the laity, and those of no mean rank, began to feel the necessity, as it may be called, of putting into a permanent form the "thick-coming fancies" which gleam along the imagination of men of genius. Sir Thomas Malony, who compiled the *Morte d'Arthur* from French originals, was a person of honour and worship; and Lord Berners, the excellent translator of Froissart, and author of a Romance called *The Chevalier de la Cygne*, is an illustrious

example that a nobleman of high estimation did not think his time misemployed on this species of composition. Some literary fame must therefore have attended these efforts; and perhaps less eminent authors might, in the later ages, receive some pecuniary advantages. The translator of *Perceforest*, formerly mentioned, who appears to have been an Englishman or Fleming, in his address to the warlike and invincible nobility of France, holds the language of a professional author, who expected some advantage besides that of pleasing those whom he addressed; and who expresses proportional gratitude for the favourable reception of his former feeble attempts to please them. It is possible, therefore, that the publishers, these lions of literature, had begun already to admit the authors into some share of their earnings. Other printers, like the venerable Caxton, compiled themselves, or translated from other languages, the Romances which they sent to the press; thus uniting in their own persons the three separate departments of author, printer, and publisher.

The Prose Romance did not, in the general conduct of the story, where digressions are heaped on digressions, without the least respect to the principal narrative, greatly differ from that of their metrical predecessors, being, to the full, as tedious and inartificial; nay, more so, in proportion as the new Romances were longer than the old. In the transference from verse to prose, and the amplification which the scenes underwent in the process, many strong, forcible, and energetic touches of the original author have been weakened, or altogether lost; and the reader misses with regret some of the redeeming bursts of rude poetry which, in the Metrical Romance, make amends for many hundred lines of bald and rude versification. But, on the other hand, the Prose Romances were written for a more advanced stage of society, and by authors whose language was much more copious, and who certainly belonged to a more educated class than the ancient minstrels. Men were no longer satisfied with hearing of hard battles and direful wounds; they demanded, at the hand of those who professed to entertain them, some insight

into nature, or at least into manners; some description of external scenery, and a greater regard to probability both in respect of the characters which are introduced, and the events which are narrated. These new demands the Prose Romances endeavoured to supply to the best of their power. There was some attention shown to relieve their story, by the introduction of new characters, and to illustrate these personages by characteristic dialogue. The lovers conversed with each other in the terms of metaphysical gallantry, which were used in real life; and, from being a mere rhapsody of warlike feats, the Romance began to assume the nobler and more artificial form of a picture of manners. It is in the prose folios of *Lancelot du Lac*, *Perceforest*, and others, that antiquarians find recorded the most exact accounts of fights, tournaments, feasts, and other magnificent displays of chivalric splendour; and as they descend into more minute description than the historians of the time thought worthy of their pains, they are a mine from which the painful student may extract much valuable information. This, however, is not the full extent of their merit. These ancient books, amid many pages of dull repetition and uninteresting dialect, and notwithstanding the languor of an inartificial, protracted, and confused story, exhibit from time to time passages of deep interest, and situations of much novelty, as well as specimens of spirited and masculine writing. The general reader, who dreads the labour of winnowing out these valuable passages from the sterile chaff through which they are scattered, will receive an excellent idea of the beauties and defects of the Romance from Tressan's *Corps d'Extraits de Romans de Chevalrie*, from Mr. Ellis's *Specimens of Early English Romances*, and from Mr. Dunlop's *History of Fiction*.

These works continued to furnish the amusement of the most polished courts in Europe so long as the manners and habits of Chivalry continued to animate them. Even the sagacious Catherine of Medicis considered the Romance of *Perceforest* as the work best qualified to form the manners and amuse the leisure of a young prince; since she impressed on Charles IX. the neces-

sity of studying it with attention. But by degrees the progress of new opinions in religion, the promulgation of a stricter code of morality, together with the important and animating discussions which began to be carried on by means of the press, diverted the public attention from these antiquated legends. The Protestants of England, and the Huguenots of France, were rigorous in their censure of books of chivalry, in proportion as they had been patronised formerly under the Catholic system; perhaps because they helped to arrest men's thoughts from more serious subjects of occupation. The learned Ascham thus inveighs against the Romance of *Morte d'Arthur*, and at the same time acquaints us with its having passed out of fashion: "In our forefathers' tyme, when Papistrie, as a standyng poole, covered and overflowed all *Englande*, fewe bookes were read in our tongue, savying certaine bookes of chevalrie, as they said for pastime and pleasure; which, as some say, were made in monasteries by idle monks, or wanton chanons. As for example, *La Morte d'Arthur*, the whole pleasure of which booke standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open manslaughter, and bold bawdrye: in which booke they are counted the noblest knightes that do kill most men without any quarrell, and commit fowlest adulteries by sutlest shiftes; as Sir *Launcelote*, with the wife of King *Arthur* his master; Sir *Tristram*, with the wife of King *Marke* his uncle; Sir *Lamerocke*, with the wife of King *Lote*, that was his own aunt. This is goode stuffe for wise men to laughe at, or honest men to take pleasure at: yet I know, when God's Bible was banished the court, and *La Morte d'Arthur* received into the prince's chamber."*

The brave and religious La Noue is not more favourable to the perusal of Romances than the learned Ascham; attributing to the public taste for these compositions the decay of morality among the French nobility. "The ancient fables whose relikes doe yet remaine, namely *Lancelot of the Lake*, *Pierceforest*, *Tristran*, *Giron the Courteous*, and such others, doe beare witnesse

* *Works* of Roger Ascham, p. 254. Fourth edition.

of this olde vanitie; herewith were men fed for the space of 500 yeeres, untill our language growing more polished, and our mindes more ticklish, they were driven to invent some nouelties wherewith to delight us. Thus came ye bookes of *Amadis* into light among us in this last age. But to say ye truth, *Spaine* bred thē, and *France* new clothed thē in gay garments. In ye daies of *Henrie the Second* did they beare chiefest sway, and I think if any man would then have reproved thē, he should have bene spit at, because they were of themselves playfellowes and maintainers to a great sort of persons; whereof some, after they had learned to amize in speech, their teeth watered, so desirous were they even to taste of some small morsēls of the delicacies therein most livelie and naturally represented."* The gallant Marechal proceeds at considerable length to refute the arguments of those who contended, that these books were intended as a spur to the practice of arms and honourable exercises amongst youth, and, labours hard to show that they teach dishonest practices both in love and in arms. It is impossible to suppress a smile when we find such an author as La Noue denouncing the introduction of spells, witchcrafts, and enchantments into these volumes, not because such themes are absurd and nonsensical, but because the representing such beneficent enchanters as Alquife and Urganda, is, in fact, a vindication of those who traffic with the powers of darkness; and because those who love to read about sorceries and enchantments become, by degrees, familiarized with those devilish mysteries, and may at length be induced to have recourse to them in good earnest.

The Romances of Chivalry did not, however, sink into disrepute under the stern rebuke of religious puritans or severe moralists, but became gradually neglected as the customs of chivalry itself fell into disregard; when, of course, the books which breathed its spirit, and were written under its influence, ceased to produce

* *The Politicke and Militaire Discourses* of the Lord De La Nowe, pp. 87, 88. Quarto, Lond. 1587.

any impression on the public mind, and, superseded by better models of composition, and overwhelmed with the ridicule of Cervantes, sunk by degrees into utter contempt and oblivion.

Other works of amusement, of the same general class, succeeded the proper Romance of Chivalry. Of these we shall take some notice hereafter; since we must here close our general view of the history of Romance, and proceed briefly to give some account of those peculiar to the various European nations.

II. We can here but briefly touch upon a subject of great interest and curiosity, the peculiar character and tone, namely, which the Romance of Chivalry received from the manners and early history of the nations among whom it is found to exist; and the corresponding question, in what degree each appears to have borrowed from other countries the themes of their own minstrels, or to have made use of materials common to the whole.

Scandinavia, as was to be expected, may be safely considered as the richest country in Europe in ancient tales corresponding with the character of Romance; sometimes composed entirely in poetry or rhythm, sometimes in prose, and much more frequently in a mixture of prose, narrative, and lyrical effusions. Their well-known Skalds or bards held a high rank in their courts and councils. The character of a good poet was scarce second to that of a gallant leader, and many of the most celebrated champions ambitiously endeavoured to unite both in their own persons. Their earlier sagas or tales approach to the credit of real history, and were unquestionably meant as such, though, as usual at an early period, debased by the intermixture of those *speciosa miracula*, which the love of the wonderful early introduces into the annals of an infant country. There are, however, very many of the sagas, indeed by far the greater number of those now known to exist, which must be considered as falling rather under the class of fictitious than of real narratives; and which, therefore, belong to our present subject of enquiry. The *Omey-*

inger Saga, the *Heimskringla*, the *Saga* of Olaf Triggwason, the *Eirbiggia Saga*, and several others, may be considered as historical; whilst the numerous narratives referring to the history of the Nibilungen and Volsungen are as imaginary as the Romances which treat of King Arthur and of Charlemagne. These singular compositions, short, abrupt, and concise in expression, full of bold and even extravagant metaphor, exhibiting many passages of forceful and rapid description, hold a character of their own; and while they remind us of the indomitable courage and patient endurance of the hardy Scandinavians, at once the honour and the terror of Europe, rise far above the tedious and creeping style which characterized the minstrel efforts of their successors, whether in France or England. In the pine forests also, and the frozen mountains of the north, there were nursed, amid the relics of expiring Paganism, many traditions of a character more wild and terrible than the fables of classical superstition; and these the gloomy imagination of the skalds failed not to transfer to their romantic tales. The late spirit of enquiry which has been so widely spread through Germany, has already begun to throw much light on this neglected storehouse of romantic lore, which is worthy of much more attention than has yet been bestowed upon it in Britain. It must, however, be remarked, that although the north possesses champions and Romances of its own, unknown to southern song, yet, in a later age, the inhabitants of these countries borrowed from the French minstrels some of their most popular subjects; and hence we find sagas on the subject of Sir Tristrem, Sir Percival, Sir Ywain, and others, the well-known themes of French and English Romance. These, however, must necessarily be considered later in date, as well as far inferior in interest, to the sagas of genuine northern birth. Mr. Ritson has indeed quoted their existence as depreciating the pretensions of the northern nations to the possession of poems of high antiquity of their own native growth. Had he been acquainted with the *Norman-Kiempe-Datur*, a large folio, printed at Stockholm in

1737, he would have been satisfied, that out of the numerous collection of legends respecting the achievements of Gothic champions, far the greater part are of genuine Norse origin; and although having many features in common with the Romances of southern chivalry, are, in the other marked particulars, distinctly divided from that class of fictitious composition.

The country of Germany, lying contiguous to France, and constantly engaged in friendly and hostile intercourse with that great seat of romantic fiction, became, of course, an early partaker in the stores which it afforded. The minnesingers of the Holy Empire were a race no less cherished than the troubadours of Provence, or the minstrels of Normandy; and no less active in availing themselves of their indigenous traditions, or importing those of other countries, in order to add to their stock of romantic fiction. Godfred of Strasburgh composed many thousand lines upon the popular subject of Sir Tristrem; and others have been equally copious, both as translators and as original authors, upon various subjects connected with French Romance; but Germany possessed materials, partly borrowed from Scandinavia, partly peculiar to her own traditional history, as well as to that of the Roman empire, which they applied to the construction of a cycle of heroes as famous in Teutonic song as those of Arthur and Charlemagne in France and Britain.

As in all other cases of the kind, a real conqueror, the fame of whose exploits survived in tradition, was adopted as the central object, around whom were to be assembled a set of champions, and with whose history was to be interwoven the various feats of courage which they performed, and the adventures which they underwent. Theodorick, King of the Goths, called in these romantic legends, Diderick of Bern (*i. e.* Verona), was selected for this purpose by the German minnesingers. Amongst the principal personages introduced are Ezzel, King of the Huns, who is no other than the celebrated Attila; and Gunter, King of Burgundy, who is identified with a Guntachar of history, who really held that kingdom. The good knight Wolfram de Eschen-

bach seems to have been the first who assembled the scattered traditions and minstrel tales concerning these sovereigns into one large volume of German verse, entitled *Helden-Buch*, or the Book of Heroes. In this the author has availed himself of the unlimited license of a romancer; and has connected with the history of Diderick and his chivalry a number of detached legends, which had certainly a separate and independent existence. Such is the tale of *Sigurd the Horny*, which has the appearance of having originally been a Norse Saga. An analysis of this singular piece was published by Mr. Weber, in a work entitled *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities, from the earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian Romances;* and the subject has been fully illustrated by the publications of the learned Von der Hagen in Germany, and those of the Honourable William Herbert.

It is here only necessary to say, that Theodorick, like Charlemagne and Arthur, is considered in the Romance as a monarch more celebrated for the valorous achievements of the brotherhood of chivalry whom he has drawn around him than for his own, though neither deficient in strength nor courage. His principal followers have each their discriminatory and peculiar attributes. Meister Hildebrand, the Nestor of the band, is, like the Maugis of Charlemagne's heroes, a magician as well as a champion. Hogan, or Hagan, begot betwixt a mortal and a sea-goblin, is the fierce Achilles of the confederation. It is the uniform custom of the romancers to conclude by a general and overwhelming catastrophe, which destroys the whole ring of chivalry whose feats they had commemorated. The ruin which Roncesvalles brought to the Paladins of Charlemagne, and the fatal battle of Camlan to the Knights of the Round Table, fell upon the warriors of Diderick through the revengeful treachery of Crimhilda, the wife of Ezzel; who, in revenge for the death of her first husband, and in her inordinate desire to possess the treasures of the Niflunga or Burgundians, brought destruction on all those celebrated champions. Mr. Weber observes, that these German fictions differ from the Romances of French Chivalry, in the greater ferocity and less refine-

ment of sentiment ascribed to the heroes; and also in their employing to a great extent the machinery of the Duergar, or Dwarfs, a subterranean people to whom the *Helden-Buch* ascribes much strength and subtilty, as well as profound skill in the magic art; and who seem, to a certain extent, the predecessors of the European fairy. The same excellent authority affords us another curious Romance of German origin, entitled Duke Ernest of Bavaria, which appears deeply tinged with Oriental learning and imagination. The hero, at no greater distance than the Isle of Crete, has the good fortune, such at least he must have esteemed it, in his capacity of a knight-errant, to meet with a people having necks and heads like storks. He is in danger of being shipwrecked in a mountain of adamant—is carried away by a roc, and meets with sundry other adventures, which remind us of those of the celebrated Sinbad.

Italy, so long the seat of classical learning, and where that learning was first revived, seems never to have strongly embraced the taste for the Gothic Romance. They received, indeed, the forms and institutions of chivalry; but the Italians seem to have been in a considerable degree strangers to its spirit, and not to have become deeply enamoured of its literature. There is an old Romance of Chivalry proper to Italy, called *Guerino the Wretched*, but we doubt if even this be of indigenous growth. Indeed, when they did adopt from the French the fashionable tales of Charlemagne and his Paladins, they did not attract the attention of the classical Italians, until Boiardo, Berni, Pulci, and, above all, the divine Ariosto, condescended to use them as the basis of their well-known romantic poems; and thus the fictitious narratives originally composed in metre, and after re-written in prose, were anew decorated with the honours of verse. The romantic poets of Italy did not even disdain to imitate the rambling, diffuse, and episodical style proper to the old Romance; and Ariosto, in particular, although he torments the reader's attention by digressing from one adventure to another, delights us, upon frequent perusals, by the extreme ingenuity with which he gathers up the broken ends of

his narrative, and finally weaves them all handsomely together in the same piece. But the merits and faults of romantic poetry form themselves the fruitful subject of a long essay. We here only notice the origin of those celebrated works, as a species of composition arising out of the old Romance, though surpassing it in regularity, as well as in all the beauties of style and diction.

With Spain the idea of Romance was particularly connected; and the associations which are formed upon perusing the immortal work of Cervantes, induce us for a long time to believe that the country of Don Quixote must be the very cradle of romantic fiction. Yét, if we speak of priority of date, Spain was among the last nations in Europe with whom Romance became popular. It was not indeed possible that, among a people speaking so noble and poetical a language, engaged in constant wars, which called forth at once their courage and their genius, there should not exist many historical and romantic ballads descriptive of their rencounters with the Moors. But their native poets seem to have been too much engaged with the events of their own age, or of that which had just preceded them, to permit of their seeking subjects in the regions of pure fiction; and we have not heard of a Spanish Metrical Romance, unless the poems describing the adventures of the Cid, should be supposed to have any affinity to that class of composition. The Peninsula, however, though late in adopting the prevailing taste for romantic fiction, gave origin to one particular class, which was at least as popular as any which had preceded it. *Amadis de Gaul*, the production, it would seem, of Vasco de Lobeira, a Portuguese knight, who lived in the fourteenth century, gave a new turn to the tales of chivalry; and threw into the shade the French Prose Romances, which, until the appearance of this distinguished work, had been the most popular in Europe.

The author of *Amadis*, in order, perhaps, to facilitate the other changes which he introduced, and to avoid rushing against preconceived ideas of events or character, laid aside the worn-out features of Arthur and Char-

lemagne, and imagined to himself a new dynasty both of sovereigns and of heroes, to whom he ascribed a style of manners much more refined, and sentiments much more artificial, than had occurred to the authors of *Perceval* or *Perceforest*. Lobeira had also taste enough to perceive, that some unity of design would be a great improvement on the old romance, where one adventure is strung to another with little connexion from the beginning to the end of the volume; which thus concluded, not because the plot was winded up, but because the author's invention, or the printer's patience, was exhausted. In the work of the Portuguese author, on the contrary, he proposes a certain end, to advance or retard which all the incidents of the work have direct reference. This is the marriage of Amadis with Oriana, against which a thousand difficulties are raised by rivals, giants, sorcerers, and all the race of evil powers unfavourable to chivalry; whilst these obstacles are removed by the valour of the hero, and constancy of the heroine, succoured on their part by those friendly sages, and blameless sorceresses, whose intervention gave so much alarm to the tender-conscienced De la Noue. Lobeira also displayed considerable attention to the pleasure which arises from the contrast of character; and to relieve that of Amadis, who is the very essence of chivalrous constancy, he has introduced Don Galaor, his brother, a gay libertine in love, whose adventures form a contrast with those of his more serious relative. Above all, the *Amadis* displays an attention to the style and conversation of the piece, which, although its effects are now exaggerated and ridiculous, was doubtless at the time considered as the pitch of elegance; and here were, for the first time, introduced those hyperbolical compliments, and that inflated and complicated structure of language, the sense of which walks as in a masquerade.

The *Amadis* at first consisted only of four books, and in that limited shape may be considered as a very well-conducted story; but additions were speedily made which extended the number to twenty-four; containing the history of Amadis subsequent to his obtaining pos-

session of Oriana, and down to his death, as also of his numerous descendants. The theme was not yet exhausted; for, as the ancient romancers, when they commenced a new work, chose for their hero some newly-invented Paladin of Charlemagne, or knight of King Arthur, so did their successors adopt a new descendant of the family of Amadis, whose genealogy was thus multiplied to a prodigious degree. For an account of *Esplandian*, *Florimond of Greece*, *Palmerin of England*, and the other Romancers of this class, the reader must be referred to the valuable labours of Mr. Southey, who has abridged both *Amadis* and *Palmerin* with the most accurate attention to the style and manners of the original. The books of *Amadis* became so very popular as to supersede the elder Romances almost entirely, even at the court of France, where, according to La Noue, already quoted, they were introduced about the reign of Henry II. It was against the extravagance of these fictions, in character and in style, that the satire of Cervantes was chiefly directed; and almost all the library of Don Quixote belongs to this class of Romancers, which, no doubt, his adventures contributed much to put out of fashion.

In every point of view, France must be considered as the country in which Chivalry and Romance flourished in the highest perfection; and the originals of almost all the early Romances, whether in prose or verse, whether relating to the history of Arthur or of Charlemagne, are to be found in the French language; and other countries possess only translations from thence. This will not be so surprising when it is recollected, that these earlier Romances were written, not only for the use of the French, but of the English themselves, amongst whom French was the prevailing language during the reigns of the Anglo-Norman monarchs. Indeed, it has been ingeniously supposed, and not without much apparent probability, that the fame of Arthur was taken by the French minstrels for the foundation of their stories in honour of the English kings, who reigned over the supposed dominions of that British hero; while, on the other hand, the minstrels who repaired to

the court of France, celebrated the prowess of Charlemagne and his twelve peers as a subject more gratifying to those who sat upon his throne. It is, perhaps, some objection to this ingenious theory, that, as we have already seen, the battle of Hastings was opened by a minstrel, who sung the war-song of Roland, the nephew of Charlemagne; so that the Norman duke brought with him to England the tales that are supposed, at a much later date, to have been revived to soothe the national pride of the French minstrels.

How the French minstrels came originally by the traditional relics concerning Arthur and Merlin, on which they wrought so long and so largely, must, we fear, always remain uncertain. From the Saxons we may conclude they had them not; for the Saxons were the very enemies against whom Arthur employed his good sword Excalibar; that is to say, if there was such a man, or such a weapon. We know, indeed, that the British, like all the branches of the Celtic race, were much attached to poetry and music, which the numerous relics of ancient poetry in Wales, Ireland, and the Highlands of Scotland, sufficiently evince. Arthur, a name famous among them, with some traditions concerning the sage Merlin, may have floated either in Armorica, or among the half-British of the borders of Scotland, and of Cumberland; and, thus preserved, may have reached the ear of the Norman minstrels, either in their newly-conquered dominions, or through their neighbours of Britanny. A theme of this sort once discovered, and found acceptable to the popular ear, gave rise, of course, to a thousand imitations; and gradually drew around it a cloud of fiction which, embellished by such poetry as the minstrels could produce, arranged itself by degrees into a system of fabulous history, as the congregated vapours touched by the setting sun, assume the form of battlements and towers. We know that the history of Sir Tristrem, first versified by Thomas the Rymer of Ercildoune, was derived from Welsh traditions, though told by a Saxon poet. In fact, it may be easily supposed, that the romancers of that early period were more eager to acquire popular subjects

than delicately scrupulous of borrowing from their neighbours; and when the foundation-stone was once laid, each subsequent minstrel brought his contribution to the building. The idea of an association of knights assembled around one mighty sovereign, was so flattering to all the ruling princes of Europe, that almost all of them endeavoured to put themselves at the head of some similar institution, and the various Orders of Chivalry are to be traced to this origin. The historical foundation of this huge superstructure is almost imperceptible. Mr. Turner has shown that the evidence rather inclines to prove the actual existence of King Arthur; and the names of Gawain, his nephew, and of Geneura, his faithful spouse, of Mordred, and Merlin, were preserved by Welsh tradition. To the same source may be referred the loves of Tristrem and Ysolde, which, although a separate story, has become, in the later Romances, amalgamated with that of Arthur. But there can be little doubt that all beyond the bare names of the heroes owes its existence to the imagination of the romancers.

It might be thought that the Romances referring to the feats of Charlemagne ought to contain more historical truth than those concerning Arthur; since the former relate to a well-known monarch and conqueror, the latter to a personage of a very doubtful and shadowy existence. But the Romances concerning both are equally fabulous. Charles had, indeed, an officer, perhaps a kinsman, named Roland, who was slain with other nobles in the field of Roncesvalles, fighting, not against the Saracens or Spaniards, but against the Gascons. This is the only point upon which the real history of Charlemagne coincides with that invented for him by romancers. Roland was Prefect of Bretagne, and his memory was long preserved in the war-song which bore his name. A fabulous chronicler, calling himself Turpin, compiled, in or about the eleventh century, a romantic history of Charlemagne; but it may be doubted whether, in some instances, he has not availed himself of the fictions already devised by the early romancers, while to those who succeeded them his an-

nals afforded matter for new figments. The personal character of Charlemagne has suffered considerably in the hands of the romantic authors, although they exaggerated his power and his victories. He is represented as fond of flattery, irritable in his temper, ungrateful for the services rendered him by his most worthy Paladins, and a perpetual dupe to the treacherous artifices of Count Gan, or Ganelon, of Mayence; a renegade to whom the romancers impute the defeat at Roncesvalles, and all the other misfortunes of the reign of Charles. This unfavourable view of the Prince, although it may bear some features of royalty, neither resembles the real character of the conqueror of the Saxons and Lombards, nor can be easily reconciled with the idea, that he was introduced to flatter the personal vanity of the Princes of the Valois race, by a portrait of their great predecessor.

The circumstance, that Roland was a lieutenant of Britanny, and the certainty that Marie borrowed from that country the incidents out of which she composed her lays, seems to fortify the theory, that the French minstrels obtained from that country much of their most valuable materials; and that, after all that has been said and supposed, the history of Arthur probably reached them through the same channel.

The Latin writers of the middle ages afforded the French romancers the themes of those metrical legends which they have composed on subjects of classical fame.

The honour of the prose Romances of Chivalry, exclusive always of the books of Amadis, belongs entirely to the French, and the curious volumes which are now the object of so much research amongst collectors, are almost universally printed at Paris.

England, so often conquered, yet fated to receive an accession of strength from each new subjugation, cannot boast much of ancient literature of any kind; and, in the department of which we treat, was totally inferior to France. The Saxons had, no doubt, Romances (taking the word in its general acceptation); and Mr. Turner, to whose researches we are so much indebted, has given us the abridgment of one entitled *Caedmon*, in which the

hero, whose adventures are told much after the manner of the ancient Norse Sagas, encounters, defeats, and finally slays an evil being called Grendel, who, except in his being subject to death, seems a creature of a supernatural description.* But the literature of the Saxons was destroyed by the success of William the Conqueror, and the Norman knights and barons, among whom England was in a great measure divided, sought amusement, not in the lays of the vanquished, but in those composed in their own language. In this point of view, England, as a country, may lay claim to many of the French Romances, which were written, indeed, in that language, but for the benefit of the court and nobles of England, by whom French was still spoken. When the two languages began to assimilate together, and to form the mixed dialect termed the Anglo-Norman, we have good authority for saying that it was easily applied to the purpose of romantic fiction, and recited in the presence of the nobility.

Robert de la Brunne, who composed his *History of England* about this time, has this remarkable passage, which we give, along with the commentary of the Editor of *Sir Tristrem*, as it is peculiarly illustrative of the subject we are enquiring into.

Als thai haf wryten and sayd
Haf I alle in myn Inglis layd,
In simple speche as I couthe,
That is lightest in manne's mouthe.
I made noght for no disours,
Ne for no seggers, no harpours,
Bot for the luf of symple men,
That strange Inglis cannot ken;
For many it ere that strange Inglis,
In ryme wate never what it is;
And bot thai wist what it mente,
Ellis methought it were alle schente.
I made it not for to be praysed,
Bot at the lewed men were aysed.
If it were made in ryme couwee,
Or in strangere, or enterlacé,

* The English public are now made more fully acquainted with this ancient process, by the ample and more interesting analysis, furnished by Mr. Connybran.

That rede Inglis it ere inowe
That couthe not have coppled a kowe.
That outher in cowee or in baston,
Sum suld haf ben fordon;
So that fele men that it herde
Suld not witte howe that it ferde.
I see in soug, in sedgeying tale,
Of Erceldoune and of Kendale,
Non tham says as thai tham wroght,
And in ther saying it semes noght,
That may thou here in Sir Tristrem,
Over gestes it has the steem,
Over all that is or was,
If men it sayd as made Thomas;
Bot I here it no man so say,
That of some copple som is away.
So thare fayre saying here beforne,
Is thare travaile nere forlorne;
Thai sayd it for pride and nobleye,
That were not suylke as thei.
And alle that thai willed overwhere,
Alle that ilke will now forfare.
Thai sayd it in so quaint Inglis,
That many wate not what it is.
Therfore heuyed wele the more
In strange ryme to travayle sere
And my wit was our thynne;
So strange speche to travayle in;
And forsoth I couth noght
So strange Inglis as thai wroght,
And men besoght me many a tyme
To turne it bot in light ryme.
They seyd if I in strange ryme it turn,
To here it many on suld skurne;
For in it ere names fulle selcouthe,
That ere not used now in mouthe.
And therfore, for the commonalté,
That blythely wild listen to me,
On light lange I it began,
For luf of the lewed man.

"This passage requires some commentary, as the sense has been generally mistaken. Robert de Brunne does not mean, as has been supposed, that the minstrels who repeated Thomas's Romance of *Sir Tristrem*, disguised the meaning by putting it into '*quainte Inglis*;' but, on the contrary, that Kendal and Thomas of Erceldoune did themselves use such '*quainte Inglis*,' that those who repeated the story were unable to understand it, or to make it intelligible to their hearers. Above all, he

complains, that by writing an intricate and complicated stanza, as '*ryme cowee, strangere*,' or '*entrelacé*,' it was difficult for the *disours* to recollect the poem; and of *Sir Tristrem*, in particular, he avers, that he never heard a perfect recital, because of some one '*copple*' or stanza, a part was always omitted. Hence he argues at length, that he himself, writing not for the minstrel or harper, nor to acquire personal fame, but solely to instruct the ignorant in the history of their country, does well in choosing a simple structure of verse, which they can retain correctly on their memory, and a style which is popular and easily understood. Besides which, he hints at the ridicule he might draw on his poem, should he introduce the uncouth names of his personages into a courtly or refined strain of verse. They were

Great names, but hard in verse to stand.

While he arrogates praise to himself for his choice, he excuses Thomas of Erceldoune and Kendale for using a more ambitious and ornate kind of poetry. 'They wrote,' he says, 'for pride (fame) and for nobles, not such as these my ignorant hearers.' "*

If the editor of *Sir Tristrem* be correct in his commentary, there existed in the time of Thomas de Brunne minstrels or poets who composed English poetry to be recited in the presence of the great, and who, for that purpose, used a singularly difficult stanza, which was very apt to be mutilated in recitation. *Sir Tristrem*, even as it now exists, shows likewise that considerable art was resorted to in constructing the stanza, and has, from beginning to end, a concise, quaint, abstract turn of expression, more like the Saxon poetry than the simple, bald, and diffuse details of the French minstrel. Besides *Sir Tristrem*, there remain, we conceive, at least two other examples of "gestes written in quainte Inglis," composed, namely, according to fixed and complicated rules of verse, and with much attention to the language, though the effect produced is far from pleas-

* *Sir Tristrem*, Introduction, pp. lxi. lxii. lxiii. lxiv. lxv. Edin. 1804.

ing. They are both of Scottish origin, which may be explained, by recollecting that in the Saxon provinces of Scotland, as well as at the court, Norman was never generally used; and therefore it is probable that the English language was more cultivated in that country at an early period than in England itself, where, among the higher classes, it was for a long time superseded by that of the French conquerors. These Romances, entitled *Sir Gawain*, and *Sir Gologras*, and *Sir Galeran of Galloway*, have all the appearance of being original compositions, and display considerable poetical effort. But the uncouth use of words dragged in for the sake of alliteration, and used in secondary and oblique meanings, renders them extremely harsh in construction, as well as obscure in meaning.

In England it would seem that the difficulties pointed out by De la Brunne early threw out of fashion this ornate kind of composition; and the English minstrels had no readier resource than translating from the French, who supplied their language at the same time with the phrases of chivalry which did not exist in English. These compositions presented many facilities to the minstrel. He could, if possessed of the slightest invention, add to them at pleasure, and they might as easily be abridged, when memory failed, or occasion required. Accordingly, translations from the French fill up the list of English Romance. They are generally written in short lines rhyming together; though often, by way of variety, the third and sixth lines are made to rhyme together, and the poem is thus divided into stanzas of three couplets each. In almost all of these legends, reference is made to "the Romance," that is, some composition in the French language, as to the original authority. Nay, which is very singular, tales where the subjects appear to be of English growth, seem to have yet existed in French ere they were translated into the language of the country to which the heroes belonged. This seems to have been the case with *Hornchild*, with *Guy of Warwick*, with *Bevis of Hampton*, all of which appear to belong originally to England; yet are their earliest histories found in the French language, or at least

the vernacular versions refer to such for their authority. Even the Romance of *Richard*, England's own Cœur de Lion, has perpetual references to the French original from which it was translated. It must naturally be supposed that these translations were inferior to the originals; and whether it was owing to this cause, or that the composition of these rhymes was attended with too much facility, and so fell into the hands of very inferior composers, or that they were composed for the ruder and more illiterate part of the nation, it is certain, and is proved by the highest authority, that of Chaucer himself, that even in his time these rhyming Romances had fallen into great contempt. The *Rime of Sir Thopas*, which that poet introduces as a parody, undoubtedly, of the rhythmical Romances of the age, is interrupted by mine host Harry Bailly with the strongest and most energetic expressions of total and absolute contempt. But though the minstrels were censured by de la Brunne for lack of skill and memory, and the poems which they recited were branded as "drafty rhymings," by the far more formidable sentence of Chaucer, their acceptation with the public in general must have been favourable, since, besides many unpublished volumes, the two publications of Ritson and Weber bear evidence of their popularity. Some original compositions doubtless occur among so many translations, but they are not numerous, and few have been preserved. The very curious poem of *Sir Eger and Sir Greme*, which seems of Scottish origin, has no French original; nor has any been discovered either of the *Squire of Low Degree*, *Sir Eglamour*, *Sir Pleindamour*, or some others. But the French derivation of the two last names renders it probable that such may exist.

The minstrels and their compositions seem to have fallen into utter contempt about the time of Henry VIII. There is a piteous picture of their condition in the person of Richard Sheale, which it is impossible to read without compassion, if we consider that he was the preserver at least, if not the author, of the celebrated heroic ballad of *Chevy Chace*, at which Sir Philip Sidney's heart was wont to beat as at the sound of a trumpet.

This luckless minstrel had been robbed on Dunsmore Heath, and, shame to tell, he was unable to persuade the public that a son of the muses had ever been possessed of the twenty pounds which he averred he had lost on the occasion. The account he gives of the effect upon his spirits is melancholy, and yet ridiculous enough.

After my robbery my memory was so decayde,
That I colde neather syng nor talke, my wytts wer so dismayde.
My audacitie was gone, and all my myrry tawk,
Ther ys sum heare have sene me as myrry as a hawke;
But nowe I am so trublyde with phansis in my mynde,
That I cannot play the myrry knave, accordyng to my kynd.
Yet to tak thought, I perseve, ys not the next waye
To bring me out of det, my creditors to paye.
I may well say that I hade but evil hape,
For to lose about threscore pounds at a clape.
The losse of my mony did not greve me so sore,
But the talke of the pyple dyde greve me moch mor.
Sum sayde I was not robde, I was but a lyeng knave,
Yt was not possyble for a mynstrell so much mony to have;
In dede, to say the truthe, that ys ryght well knowene,
That I never had so moche mony of myn owene,
But I had frendds in London, whos namys I can declare,
That at all tyms wold lende me cc.lds. worth of ware,
And sum agayn such friendship I founde,
That thei wold lend me in mony nyn or tene pownde.
The occasion why I cam in dete I shall make relacion,
My wyff in dede ys a sylk woman be her occupacion,
And lynen cloths most chefly was her greatyste trayd,
And at faris and merkytts she solde sale-ware that she made;
As shertts, smockys, partlytts, hede clothes, and othar thinggs,
As sylk thredd, and eggyngs, skirrts, bandds, and strings.

From *The Chant* of Richard Sheale,
British Bibliographer, No. XIII. p. 101.

Elsewhere, Sheale hints that he had trusted to his harp, and to the well-known poverty attached to those who used that instrument, to bear him safe through Dunsmore Heath. From this time, the poor degraded minstrels seem literally to have merited the character imposed on them by the satirist Dr. Bull, and quoted with such glee by Ritson, whose enmity against Dr. Percy seems to have extended itself against the race.

"When Jesus went to Jairus house,
[Whose daughter was about to dye,]
He turn'd the minstrels out of doors,
Among the rascal company:
Beggars they are with one consent,
And rogues, by Act of Parliament."

At length the order of English minstrels was formally put down by the act 39th of Queen Elizabeth, classing them with sturdy beggars and vagabonds; in which disgraceful fellowship they only existed in the capacity of fiddlers, who accompanied their instrument with their voice. Such a character is introduced in the play of *Monsieur Thomas*, as the "poor fiddler who says his songs." Such, too, was Sheale, already mentioned: the "Minstrel's Farewell," by this unlucky child of the muses, intimates the degraded character of his profession, the professors of which now sung for their victuals.

Now for the good chear that ye have had heare,
I gyve you hartte thanks, with bowyng off my shanks.
Desyryng you be petycyon to graunte me suche commission,
Becaus my name ys Sheale, that bothe by meat and meale
To you I maye resorte, sum tyme to mye comforte.
For I perseive here at all tymes is good chere,
Both ale, wyne, and beere, as hit dothe nowe apere.
I persave wythoute fable, ye kepe a good table,
Sum tyme I wyll be your gueste, or els I were a beaste,
Knowynge off your mynde, yff I wolde not be so kynde,
Sumtyme to tast youre cuppe, and wyth you dyne and suppe.
I can be contente, yf hit be oute of Lente,
A peace of byffe to take mye honger to aslake:
Bothe mutton and veile ys goode for Rycharde Sheale."

British Bibliographer, No. XIII. p. 105.

The Metrical Romances which they recited also fell into disrepute, though some of the more popular, sadly abridged and adulterated, continued to be published in *chap books*, as they are called. About fifty or sixty years since, a person acquired the nickname of *Rosewal and Lilian* from singing that Romance about the streets of Edinburgh, which is probably the very last instance of the proper minstrel craft.

If the Metrical Romances of England can boast of few original compositions, they can show yet fewer exam-

ples of the Prose Romance. Sir Thomas Malory, indeed, compiled, from various French authorities, his celebrated *Morte D'Arthur*, indisputably the best Prose Romance the language can boast. There is also *Arthur of Little Britain;* and the Lord Berners compiled the Romance of the *Knight of the Swan.* The books of Amadis were likewise translated into English; but it may be doubted whether the country in general ever took that deep interest in the perusal of these records of love and honour with which they were greeted in France. Their number was fewer; and the attention paid to them in a country where great political questions began to be agitated, was much less than when the feudal system still continued in its full vigour.

III. We should now say something on those various kinds of romantic fictions which succeeded to the Romance of Chivalry. But we can only notice briefly works which have long slumbered in oblivion, and which certainly are not worthy to have their slumbers disturbed.

Even in the time of Cervantes, the Pastoral Romance, founded upon the *Diana* of George of Monté Mayor, was prevailing to such an extent as made it worthy of his satire. It was, indeed, a system still more remote from common sense and reality than that of chivalry itself. For the maxims of chivalry, high-strained and absurd as they are, did actually influence living beings, and even the fate of kingdoms. If *Amadis de Gaule* was a fiction, the Chevalier Bayard was a real person. But the existence of an Arcadia, a pastoral region, in which a certain fantastic sort of personages, desperately in love, and thinking of nothing else but their mistresses, played upon pipes, and wrote sonnets from morning to night, yet were supposed all the while to be tending their flocks, was too monstrously absurd to be long credited or tolerated.

A numerous, and once most popular, class of fictions, was that entitled the *Heroic Romance of the Seventeenth Century.*

If the ancient *Romance of Chivalry* has a right to be called the parent of those select and beautiful fictions

which the genius of the Italian poets has enriched with such peculiar charms, another of its direct descendants, *The Heroic Romance of the Seventeenth Century*, is, with few exceptions, the most dull and tedious species of composition that ever obtained temporary popularity. The old Romance of Heliodorus, entitled *Theagenes and Chariclea*, supplied, perhaps, the earliest model of this style of composition; but it was from the Romances of Chivalry that it derives its most peculiar characteristics. A man of a fantastic imagination, Honoré d'Urfé, led the way in this style of composition. Being willing to record certain love intrigues of a complicated nature which had taken place in his own family, and amongst his friends, he imagined to himself a species of Arcadia on the banks of the Lignon, inhabited by swains and shepherdesses, who live for love and for love alone. There are two principal stories, said to represent the family history of D'Urfé and his brother, with about thirty episodes, in which the gallantries and intrigues of Henry IV.'s court are presented under borrowed names. Considered by itself, this is but an example of the Pastoral Romance; but it was so popular, that three celebrated French authors, Gomberville, Calprenede, and Madame Scuderi, seized the pen, and composed in emulation many interminable folios of Heroic Romance. In these insipid performances, a conventional character, and a set of family manners and features, are ascribed to the heroes and heroines, although selected from distant ages and various quarters of the world. The heroines are, without exception, models of beauty and perfection; and so well persuaded of it themselves, that to approach them with the most humble declaration of love was a crime sufficient to deserve the penalty of banishment from their presence; and it is well if the doom were softened to the audacious lover, by permission, or command to live, without which, absence and death were to be accounted synonymous. On the other hand, the heroes, whatsoever kingdoms they have to govern, or other earthly duties to perform, live through these folios for love alone; and the most extraordinary revolutions which can agitate the world are ascribed to the charms of a Mandane or a

Statira acting upon the crazy understanding of their lovers. Nothing can be so uninteresting as the frigid extravagance with which these lovers express their passion; or, in their own phrase, nothing can be more freezing than their flames, more creeping than their flights of love. Yet the line of metaphysical gallantry which they exhibited had its date, and a long one, both in France and England. They remained the favourite amusement of Louis XIVth's court, although assailed by the satire of Boileau. In England they continued to be read by our grandmothers during the Augustan age of English, and while Addison was amusing the world with his wit, and Pope by his poetry, the ladies were reading Clélia, Cleopatra, and the Grand Cyrus. The fashion did not decay till about the reign of George I.; and even more lately, Mrs. Lennox, patronized by Dr. Johnson, wrote a very good imitation of Cervantes, entitled, *The Female Quixote*, which had those works for its basis. They are now totally forgotten.

The Modern Romance, so ennobled by the productions of so many master hands, would require a long disquisition. But we can here only name that style of composition in which De Foe rendered fiction more impressive than truth itself, and Swift could render plausible even the grossest impossibilities.*

* There was the less occasion to continue and complete this Essay, as the author has, in the lives of the British Novelists, expressed the opinions he entertains upon the subject of Modern Romance, and its connexion with the elder fictions by which it was preceded.

AN

ESSAY ON THE DRAMA.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA.

A DRAMA (we adopt Dr. Johnson's definition, with some little extension) is a poem of fictitious composition in dialogue, in which the action is not related but represented.

A disposition to this fascinating amusement, considered in its rudest state, seems to be inherent in human nature. It is the earliest sport of children to take upon themselves some fictitious character, and sustain it to the best of their skill, by such appropriate gestures and language, as their youthful fancies suggest, and such dress and decoration as circumstances place within their reach. The infancy of nations is as prone to this pastime as that of individuals. When the horde emerges out of a nearly brutal state, so far as to have holidays, public sports, and general rejoicings, the pageant of their imaginary deities, or of their fabulous ancestors, is usually introduced as the most pleasing and interesting part of the show. But however general the predisposition to the assumption of fictitious character may be, there is an immeasurable distance betwixt the rude games in which it first displays itself, and that polished amusement which is numbered among the fine

arts, which poetry, music, and painting, have vied to adorn; to whose service genius has devoted her most sublime efforts; while philosophy has stooped from her loftier task, to regulate the progress of the action, and give probability to the representation and personification of the scene.

The history of Greece—of that wonderful country, whose days of glory have left such a never-dying blaze of radiance behind them—the history of Greece affords us the means of correctly tracing the polished and regulated Drama, the subject of severe rule, and the vehicle for expressing the noblest poetry, from amusements as rude in their outline, as the mimic sports of children or of savages. The history of the Grecian stage is that of the dramatic art in general. They transferred the Drama, with their other literature, to the victorious Romans, with whom it rather existed as a foreign than flourished as a native art. Like the other fine arts, the stage sunk under the decay of the empire, and its fall was accelerated by the introduction of the Christian religion. In the middle ages dramatic representation revived, in the shape of the homely Mysteries and Moralities of our forefathers. The revival of letters threw light upon the scenic art, by making us acquainted with the pitch of perfection to which it had been carried by the genius of Greece. With this period commences the history of the modern stage, properly so called. Some general observations on the Drama, and the state in which it now exists in Britain, will form a natural conclusion to the present Article.

The account which we have of the origin of Grecian theatrical representations, describes them as the fantastic orgies of shepherds and peasants, who solemnized the rites of Bacchus by the sacrifice of a goat, by tumultuous dances, and by a sort of masquerade, in which the actors were disguised like the ancient *Morrice-dancers* of England, or the *Guisards* of Scotland, who have not as yet totally disused similar revels. Instead of masks, their faces were stained with the lees of wine, and the songs and jests corresponded in coarseness to the character of the satyrs and fawns, which

they were supposed to assume in honour of their patron Bacchus. Music, however, always formed a part of this rude festivity, and to this was sometimes added the recitations of an individual performer, who, possessed of more voice or talent than his companions, was able to entertain an audience for a few minutes by his own unaided exertions.

Out of such rude materials, Thespis is supposed to have been the first who framed something like an approach to a more regular entertainment. The actors under this, the first of theatrical managers, instead of running about wild among the audience, were exalted upon a cart, or upon a scaffold formed of boards laid upon tressels. In modern phrase, they were exalted from mere mummers into a company of mountebanks. In these improvements Thespis is supposed to have had the aid of one Susarion, whose efforts were more particularly directed to the comic Drama. But their fortunes have been unequal; for while the name of Thespis is still united with everything dramatic, that of Susarion has fallen into oblivion, and is only known to antiquaries.

The Drama in Greece, as afterwards in Britain, had scarce begun to develope itself from barbarism, ere, with the most rapid strides, it advanced towards perfection. Thespis and Susarion flourished about four hundred and forty or fifty years before the Christian æra. The battle of Marathon was fought in the year 490 before Christ; and it was upon Æschylus, one of the Athenian generals on that memorable occasion, that Greece conferred the honoured title of the Father of Tragedy. We must necessarily judge of his efforts, by that which he did, not by that which he left undone; and if some of his regulations may sound strange in modern ears, it is but just to compare the state in which he found the Drama, with that in which he left it.

Æschylus was the first, who, availing himself of the invention of a stage by Thespis, introduced upon the boards a plurality of actors at the same time, and converted into action and dialogue, accompanied or relieved at intervals by the musical performance of the Cho-

rus, the dull monologue of the Thespian orator. It was Æschylus, also, who introduced the deceptions of scenery; stationary, indeed, and therefore very different from the decorations of our stage, but still giving a reality to the whole performance, which could not fail to afford pleasure to those, who beheld for the first time an effort to surround the player, while invested with his theatrical character, with scenery which might add to the illusions of the representation. This was not all: A theatre, at first of wood, but afterwards of stone, circumscribed, while it accommodated, the spectators, and reduced a casual and disorderly mob to the quality and civilization of a regular and attentive audience.

The most remarkable effect of the tragedy of Æschylus, was the introduction of the Chorus in a new character, which continued long to give a peculiar tone to the Grecian Drama, and still makes the broad and striking difference betwixt that original theatre, and those which have since arisen in modern nations.

The Chorus, who sung hymns in favour of Bacchus, —the musical part, in short, of the entertainment,—remained in the days of Thespis exactly such as it had been in the rude village gambols which he had improved, the principal part of the dramatic performance. The intervention of monologue, or recitation, was merely a relief to the musicians, and a variety to the audience. Æschylus, while he assigned a part of superior consequence to the actor in his improved dialogue, new-modelled the Chorus, which custom still enjoined as a necessary and indispensable branch of the entertainment. They were no longer a body of vocal musicians, whose strains were as independent of what was spoken by the personages of the Drama, as those of our modern orchestra when performing betwixt the acts; the Chorus assumed from this time a different and complicated character, which, as we have already hinted, forms a marked peculiarity in the Grecian Drama, distinguishing it from the theatrical compositions of modern Europe.

The Chorus, according to this new model, was com-

posed of a certain set of persons, priests, captive virgins, matrons, or others, usually of a solemn and sacred character, the contemporaries of the heroes who appeared on the stage, who remained upon the scene to celebrate in hymns set to music the events which had befallen the active persons of the Drama; to afford them alternately their advice or their sympathy; and, at least, to moralize, in lyrical poetry, on the feelings to which their history and adventures, their passions and sufferings, gave rise. The Chorus might be considered as, in some degree, the representatives of the audience, or rather of the public, on whose great stage those events happen in reality, which are presented in the mimicry of the Drama. In the strains of the Chorus, the actual audience had those feelings suggested to them as if by reflection in a mirror, which the events of the scene ought to produce in their own bosom; they had at once before them the action of the piece, and the effect of that action upon a chosen band of persons, who, like themselves, were passive spectators, whose dignified strains pointed out the moral reflections to which the subject naturally gave rise. The Chorus were led or directed by a single person of their number, termed the Coryphæus, who frequently spoke or sung alone. They were occasionally divided into two bands, who addressed and replied to each other. But they always preserved the character proper to them, of spectators, rather than agents in the Drama.

The number of the Chorus varied at different periods, often extending to fifty persons, and sometimes restricted to half that number; and it is evident that the presence of so many persons on the scene officiating as no part of the *dramatis personæ*, but rather as contemporary spectators, involved many inconveniences and inconsistencies. That which the hero, however agitated by passion, must naturally have suppressed within his own breast, or uttered in soliloquy, was thus necessarily committed to the confidence of fifty people, less or more. And when a deed of violence was to be acted, the helpless Chorus, instead of interfering to prevent the atrocity to which the perpetrator had made

them privy, could only, by the rules of the theatre, exhaust their sorrow and surprise in dithyrambics. This was well ridiculed by Bentley, in his farce called *The Wishes*, in one part of which strange performance he introduced a Chorus after the manner of the ancient Greeks, who are informed by one of the *dramatis personæ*, that a madman with a firebrand has just entered the vaults beneath the place which they occupy, and which contain a magazine of gunpowder. The Chorus, instead of stirring from the dangerous vicinity, immediately commence a long complaint of the hardship of their fate, exclaiming pathetically, "O, unhappy madman—or rather unhappy we, the victims of this madman's fury—or thrice, thrice unhappy the friends of the madman, who did not secure him, and restrain him from the perpetration of such deeds of frenzy—or three and four times hapless the keeper of the magazine, who forgot the keys in the door," &c. &c. &c.*

The real Choruses of the ancients, of whose apathy and passive observation of the enormities which pass on the stage, the above is a caricature, afford some instances not much less ridiculous. But still the union which Æschylus accomplished betwixt the didactic hymns of the Chorus, and the events which were passing upon the stage, was a most important improvement upon the earlier Drama. By this means, the two unconnected branches of the old Bacchanalian revels were combined together; and we ought rather to be surprised that Æschylus ventured, while accomplishing such a union, to render the hymns sung by the Chorus subordinate to the action or dialogue, than that he did not take the bolder measure of altogether discarding that which, before his time, was reckoned the principal object of a religious entertainment.

The new theatre and stage of Athens was reared, as we have seen, under the inspection of Æschylus. He also introduced dresses in character for his principal actors, to which were added embellishments of a kind

* The author never read *The Wishes*, and quotes from the information of a friend.

which mark the wide distinction betwixt the ancient and modern stage. The personal disguise which had formerly been attained by staining the actor's face, was now, by what doubtless was considered as a high exertion of ingenuity, accomplished by the use of a mask, so painted as to represent the personage whom he represented. To augment the apparent awkwardness of this contrivance, the mouths of these masks were frequently fashioned like the extremity of a trumpet, which, if it aided the actor's voice to reach the extremity of the huge circuit to which he addressed himself, must still have made a ridiculous appearance upon the stage, had not the habits and expectations of the spectators been in a different tone from those of a modern audience. The use of the *cothurnus* or buskin, which was contrived so as to give to the performer additional and unnatural stature, would have fallen under the same censure. But the ancient and modern theatres may be said to resemble each other only in name, as will appear from the following account of the Grecian stage, abridged from the best antiquaries.

The theatres of the Greeks were immensely large in comparison to ours; and the audience sat upon rows of benches, rising above each other in due gradation. In form they resembled a horse-shoe. The stage occupied a platform, which closed in the flat end of the building, and was raised so high as to be on a level with the lowest row of benches. The central part of the theatre, or what we call the *pit*, instead of being filled with spectators, according to modern custom, was left for the occasional occupation of the Chorus, during those parts of their duty which did not require them to be nearer to the stage. This space was called the ORCHESTRA, and corresponded in some measure with the open space which, in the modern equestrian amphitheatres, is interposed betwixt the audience and the stage, for the display of feats of horsemanship. The delusion of the scene being thus removed to a considerable distance from the eye of the spectator, was heightened, and many of the objections offered to the use of the mask and the buskin were lessened, or totally removed. When

the Chorus did not occupy the orchestra, they ranged themselves beside the THYMELE, a sort of altar, surrounded with steps, placed in front of their stage Orchestra. From this, as a post of observation, they watched the progress of the Drama, and to this point the actors turned themselves when addressing them. The solemn hymns and mystic dances of the Chorus, performed during their retreat into the orchestra, formed a sort of interludes, or interruptions of the action, similar in effect to the modern division into acts. But, properly speaking, there was no interruption of the representation from beginning to end. The piece was not, indeed, constantly progressive, but the illusion of the scene was always before the audience, either by means of the actors themselves, or of the Chorus. And the musical recitation and character of the dances traced by the Chorus in their interludes, were always in correspondence with the character of the piece, grave, majestic, and melancholy; in tragedy, gay and lively; in comedy, and during the representation of satirical pieces, wild, extravagant, and bordering on buffoonery. The number of these interludes, or interruptions of the action, seems to have varied from three to six, or even more, at the pleasure of the author. The music was simple and inartificial, although it seems to have produced powerful effects on the audience. Two flute-players performed a prelude to the choral hymns, or directed the movement of the dances; which, in tragedy, were a solemn, slow, modulated succession of movements, very little resembling any thing termed dancing among the moderns.

The stage itself was well contrived for the purposes of the Greek Drama. The front was called the LOGEUM, and occupied the full width of the flat termination of the theatre, contracted, however, at each extremity, by a wall, which served to conceal the machinery necessary for the piece. The stage narrowed as it retired backwards, and the space so restricted in breadth was called the PROSCENIUM. It was terminated by a flat decoration, on which was represented the front of a temple, palace, or whatever else the poet had chosen for

his scene. Suitable decorations appeared on the wings, as in our theatres. There were several entrances, both by the back scene and in front. These were not used indiscriminately, but so as to indicate the story of the piece, and render it more clear to apprehension. Thus, the persons of the Drama, who were supposed to belong to the palace or temple in the flat scene, entered from the side or the main door, as befitted their supposed rank; those who were inhabitants of the place represented, entered through a door placed at the side of the Logeum, while those supposed to come from a distance were seen to traverse the Orchestra, and to ascend the stage by a stair of communication, so that the audience were made spectators, as it were, of his journey. The Proscenium was screened by a curtain, which was withdrawn when the piece commenced. The decorations could be in some degree altered, so as to change the scene; though this, we apprehend, was seldom practised. But machinery for the ascent of phantoms, the descent of deities, and similar exhibitions, were as much in fashion among the Greeks as on our own modern stage; with better reason, indeed, for we shall presently see that the themes which they held most proper to the stage, called frequently for the assistance of these mechanical contrivances.

In the dress and costume of their personages, the Greeks bestowed much trouble and expense. It was their object to disguise, as much as possible, the mortal actor who was to represent a divinity or a hero; and while they hid his face, and augmented his height, they failed not to assign him a masque and dress in exact conformity to the popular idea of the character represented; so that, seen across the orchestra, he might appear the exact resemblance of Hercules or of Agamemnon.

The Grecians, but in particular the Athenians, became most passionately attached to the fascinating and splendid amusement which Æschylus thus regulated, which Sophocles and Euripides improved, and which all three, with other dramatists of inferior talents, animated by the full vigour of their genius. The delightful climate of Greece permitted the spectators to remain in

the open air (for there was no roof to their huge theatres) for whole days, during which several plays, high monuments of poetical talent, were successively performed before them. The enthusiasm of their attention may be judged of by what happened during the representation of a piece written by Hegemon. It was while the Athenians were thus engaged, that there suddenly arrived the astounding intelligence of the total defeat of their army before Syracuse. The theatre was filled with the relations of those who had fallen; there was scarce a spectator who, besides sorrowing as a patriot, was not called to mourn a friend or relative. But, spreading their mantles before their faces, they commanded the representation to proceed, and, thus veiled, continued to give it their attention to the conclusion. National pride, doubtless, had its share in this singular conduct, as well as fondness for the dramatic art. Another instance is given of the nature and acuteness of their feelings, when the assembly of the people amerced Phrynicus with a fine of a thousand drachmæ, because, in a comedy founded upon the siege of Miletos, he had agitated their feelings to excess, in painting an incident which Athens lamented as a misfortune dishonourable to her arms and her councils.

The price of admission was at first one *drachma;* but Pericles, desirous of propitiating the ordinary class of citizens, caused the entrance-money to be lowered to two *oboli*, so that the meanest Athenian had the ready means of indulging in this luxurious mental banquet. As it became difficult to support the expense of the stage, for which such cheap terms of admission could form no adequate fund, the same statesman, by an indulgence yet more perilous, caused the deficiency to be supplied from the treasure destined to sustain the expense of the war. It is a sufficient proof of the devotion of the Athenians to the stage, that not even the eloquence of Demosthenes could tempt them to forego this pernicious system. He touched upon the evil in two of his orations; but the Athenians were resolved not to forego the benefits of an abuse which they were aware could not be justified;—they passed a law making it death to allude to that article of reformation.

It must not be forgotten, that the Grecian audience enjoyed the exercise of critical authority as well as of classical amusement at their theatre. They applauded and censured, as at the present day, by clapping hands and hissing. Their suffrage, at those tragedies acted upon the solemn feasts of Bacchus, adjudged a laurel crown to the most successful dramatic author. This faculty was frequently abused; but the public, on sober reflection, seldom failed to be ashamed of such acts of injustice, and faithful, upon the whole, to the rules of criticism, evinced a fineness and correctness of judgment, which never descended to the populace of any other nation.

To this general account of the Grecian stage, it is proper to add some remarks on those peculiar circumstances, from which it derives a tone and character so different from that of the modern Drama—circumstances affecting at once its style of action, mode of decoration, and general effect on the feelings of the spectators.

The Grecian Drama, it must be remembered, derived its origin from a religious ceremony, and, amid all its refinement, never lost its devotional character, unless it shall be judged to have done so in the department of satirical comedy.

When the audience was assembled they underwent a religious lustration, and the archons, or chief magistrates, paid their public adoration to Bacchus, still regarded as the patron of the theatrical art, and whose altar was always placed in the theatre.

The subject of the Drama was frequently religious. In tragedy, especially, Sophocles and Euripides, as well as Æschylus, selected their subjects from the exploits of the deities themselves, or of the demi-gods and heroes whom Greece accounted to draw an immediate descent from the denizens of Olympus, and to whom she paid nearly equal reverence. The object of the tragic poets was less to amuse and interest their audience by the history of the human heart, or soften them by the details of domestic distress, than to elevate them into a sense of devotion or submission, or to astound and terrify them by the history and actions of a race of beings be-

fore whom ordinary mortality dwindled into pigmy size. This the ancient dramatists dared to attempt; and, what may appear still more astonishing to the mere English reader, this they appear in a great measure to have performed. Effects were produced upon their audience which we can only attribute to the awful impression communicated by the recollection, that the performance was in its origin a religious ceremony, and conveying an idea of the immediate presence of the Divinity. The emotions excited by the apparition of the Eumenides, or Furies, in Æschylus's tragedy of that name, so appalled the audience, that females are said to have lost the fruit of their womb, and children to have actually expired in convulsions of terror. These effects may have been exaggerated: but that considerable inconveniences occurred from the extreme horror with which this tragedy impressed the spectators, is evident from a decree of the magistrates, limiting the number of the Chorus, in order to prevent in future such tragical consequences. It is plain, that the feeling by which such impressions arose, must have been something very different from what the spectacle of the scene alone could possibly have produced. The mere sight of actors disguised in masks, suited to express the terrific yet sublime features of an antique Medusa, with her hair entwined with serpents; the wild and dishevelled appearance, the sable and bloody garments, the blazing torches, the whole apparatus, in short, or properties as they are technically called, with which the classic fancy of Æschylus could invest those terrific personages; nay more, even the appropriate terrors of language and violence of gesture with which they were bodied forth, must still have fallen far short of the point which the poet certainly attained, had it not been for the intimate and solemn conviction of his audience that they were in the performance of an act of devotion, and, to a certain degree, in the presence of the deities themselves. It was this conviction, and the solemn and susceptible temper to which it exalted the minds of a large assembly, which prepared them to receive the electric shock produced by the visible representation of those terrible

beings, to whom, whether as personifying the stings and terrors of an awakened conscience, or as mysterious and infernal divinities, the survivors of an elder race of deities, whose presence was supposed to strike awe even into Jove himself, the ancients ascribed the task of pursuing and punishing atrocious guilt.

It was in consistency with this connexion betwixt the Drama and religion of Greece, that the principal Grecian tragedians thought themselves entitled to produce upon the stage the most sacred events of their mythological history. It might have been thought that, in doing so, they injured the effect of their fable and action, since suspense and uncertainty, so essential to the interest of a play, could not be supposed to exist where the immortal gods, beings controlling all others, and themselves uncontrolled, were selected as the agents in the piece. But it must be remembered, that the synod of Olympus, from Jove downwards, were themselves but limitary deities, possessing, indeed, a certain influence upon human affairs, but unable to stem or divert the tide of fate or destiny, upon whose dark bosom, according to the Grecian creed, gods as well as men were embarked, and both sweeping downwards to some distant, yet inevitable termination of the present system of the universe, which should annihilate at once the race of divinity and of mortality. This awful catastrophe is hinted at not very obscurely by Prometheus, who, when chained to his rock, exults, in his prophetic view, in the destruction of his oppressor Jupiter; and so far did Æschylus, in particular, carry the introduction of religious topics into his Drama, that he escaped with some difficulty from an accusation of having betrayed the Eleusinian mysteries.

Where the subject of the Drama was not actually taken from mythological history, and when the gods themselves did not enter upon the scene, the Grecian stage was, as we have already hinted, usually trod by beings scarcely less awful to the imagination of the audience; the heroes, namely, of their old traditional history, to whom they attributed an immediate descent from their deities,—a frame of body and mind surpass-

ing humanity, and after death an exaltation into the rank of demigods.

It must be added, that, even when the action was laid among a less dignified set of personages, still the altar was present on the stage; incense frequently smoked; and frequent prayers and obtestations of the deity reminded the audience that the sports of the ancient theatre had their origin in religious observances. It is scarce necessary to state how widely the classical Drama, in this respect, differs in principle from that of the modern, which pretends to be nothing more than an elegant branch of the fine arts, whose end is attained when it supplies an evening's amusement, whose lessons are only of a moral description, and which is so far from possessing a religious character, that it has, with difficulty, escaped condemnation as a profane, dissolute, and antichristian pastime. From this distinction of principle there flows a difference of practical results, serving to account for many circumstances, which might otherwise seem embarrassing.

The ancients, we have seen, endeavoured by every means in their power, including the use of masks and of buskins, to disguise the person of the actor; and at the expense of sacrificing the expression of his countenance, and the grace, or at least the ease of his form, they removed from the observation of the audience, every association which could betray the person of an individual player, under the garb of the deity or hero he was designed to represent. To have done otherwise would have been held indecorous, if not profane. It follows, that as the object of the Athenian and of the modern auditor in attending the theatre was perfectly different, the pleasure which each derived from the representation had a distinct source. Thus, for example, the Englishman's desire to see a particular character is intimately connected with the idea of the actor by whom it is performed. He does not wish to see Hamlet in the abstract, so much as to see how Kemble performs that character, and to compare him perhaps with his own recollections of Garrick in the same part. He comes prepared to study each variation of the actor's

countenance, each change in his accentuation and deportment; to note with criticial accuracy the points which discriminate his mode of acting from that of others; and to compare the whole with his own abstract of the character. The pleasure arising from this species of critical investigation and contrast is so intimately allied with our ideas of theatrical amusement, that we can scarce admit the possibility of deriving much satisfaction from a representation sustained by an actor, whose personal appearance and peculiar expression of features should be concealed from us, however splendid his declamation, or however appropriate his gesture and action. But this mode of considering the Drama, and the delight which we derive from it, would have appeared to the Greeks a foolish and profane refinement, not very different in point of taste from the expedient of Snug the joiner, who intimated his identity by letting his natural visage be seen, under the mask of the lion which he represented. It was with the direct purpose of concealing the features of the individual actors, as tending to destroy the effect of his theatrical disguise, that the mask and buskin were first invented, and afterwards retained in use. The figure was otherwise so dressed as to represent the Deity or demigod, according to the statue best known, and adored with most devotion by the Grecian public. The mask was, by artists who were eminent in the plastic art, so formed as to perfect the resemblance. Theseus, or Hercules, stood before the audience, in the very form with which painters and statuaries had taught them to invest the hero, and there was certainly thus gained a more complete scenic deception, than could have been obtained in our present mode. It was aided by the distance interposed betwixt the audience and the stage; but, above all, by the influence of enthusiasm acting upon the congregated thousands, whose imagination, equally lively and susceptible, were prompt to receive the impressions which the noble verse of their authors conveyed to their ears, and the living personification of their gods and demigods placed before their eyes.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that while these ob-

servations plead an apology, arising out of custom and manners, for the mask and the buskin of the ancients, they leave where it stood before every objection to those awkward and unseemly disguises, considered in themselves, and without reference to the peculiar purpose and tendency of the ancient theatre. In fact, the exquisite pleasure derived from watching the eloquence of feature and eye, which we admire in an accomplished actor, was not, as some have supposed, sacrificed by the ancients for the assumption of these disguises. They never did, and, according to the plan of their theatres, never could, possess that source of enjoyment. The circuit of the theatre was immense, and the eyes of the thousands whom it contained were so far removed from the stage, that, far from being able to enjoy the minute play of the actor's features, the mask and buskin were necessary to give distinction to his figure, and to convey all which the ancients expected to see, his general resemblance, namely, to the character he represented.

The Grecian style of acting, so far as it has been described to us, corresponded to the other circumstances of the representation. It affected gravity and sublimity of movement and of declamation. Rapidity of motion, and vivacity of action, seem to have been reserved for occasions of particular emotion; and that delicacy of by-play, as well as all the aid which look and slight gesture bring so happily to the aid of an impassioned dialogue, were foreign to their system. The actors, therefore, had an easier task than on the modern stage, since it is much more easy to preserve a tone of high and dignified declamation, than to follow out the whirlwind and tempest of passion, in which it is demanded of the performer to be energetic without bombast, and natural without vulgarity.

The Grecian actors held a high rank in the republic, and those esteemed in the profession were richly recompensed. Their art was the more dignified, because the poets themselves usually represented the principal character in their own pieces,—a circumstance which corroborates what we have already stated concerning

the comparative inferiority of talents required in a Grecian actor, who was only expected to move with grace and declaim with truth and justice. His disguise hid all personal imperfections, and thus a Grecian poet might aspire to become an actor, without that extraordinary and unlikely union of moral and physical powers, which would be necessary to qualify a modern dramatist to mount the stage in person, and excel at once as a poet and as an actor.

It is no part of our present object to enter into any minute examination of the comparative merits of the three great tragedians of Athens, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Never, perhaps, did there arise, within so short a space, such a succession of brilliant talents. Sophocles might, indeed, be said to be the contemporary of both his rivals, for his youthful emulation was excited by the success of Æschylus, and the eminence of his latter years was disturbed by the rivalry of Euripides, whom, however, he survived. To Æschylus, who led the van in dramatic enterprise, as he did in the field of Marathon, the sanction of antiquity has ascribed unrivalled powers over the realms of astonishment and terror. At his summons, the mysterious and tremendous volume of destiny, in which are inscribed the doom of gods and men, seemed to display its leaves of iron before the appalled spectators; the more than mortal voices of Deities, Titans, and departed Heroes, were heard in awful conference; heaven bowed, and its divinities descended; earth yawned, and gave up the pale spectres of the dead; and the yet more undefined and grisly forms of those infernal deities who struck horror into the gods themselves. All this could only be dared and done by a poet of the highest order, confident, during that early age of enthusiasm, that he addressed an audience prompt to kindle at the heroic scene which he placed before them. It followed almost naturally, from his character, that the dramas of Æschylus, though full of terrible interest, should be deficient in grace and softness; that his sublime conciseness should deviate sometimes into harshness and obscurity; that, finding it impossible to sustain himself at the height to which he

had ascended, he should sometimes drop, "fluttering his pinions vain," into great inequalities of composition; and, finally, that his plots should appear rude and inartificial, contrasted with those of his successors in the dramatic art. Still, however, Æschylus led not only the way in the noble career of the Grecian drama, but outstripped, in point of sublimity at least, those by whom he was followed.

Sophocles, who obtained from his countrymen the title of the *Bee* of Attica, rivalled Æschylus when in the possession of the stage, and obtained the first prize. His success occasioned the veteran's retreat to Sicily, where he died, commanding that his epitaph should make mention of his share in the victory of Marathon, but should contain no allusion to his dramatic excellencies. His more fortunate rival judiciously avoided the dizzy and terrific path which Æschylus had trod with so firm and daring a step. It was the object of Sophocles to move sorrow and compassion, rather than to excite indignation and terror. He studied the progress of action with more attention than Æschylus, and excelled in that modulation of the story by which interest is excited at the beginning of a drama, maintained in its progress, and gratified at its conclusion. His subjects are also of a nature more melancholy and less sublime than those of his predecessors. He loved to paint heroes rather in their forlorn than in their triumphant fortunes, aware that the contrast offered new sources of the pathetic to the author. Sophocles was the most fortunate of the Greek tragedians. He attained the age of ninety-one years; and in his eightieth, to vindicate himself from a charge of mental imbecility, he read to the Judges his *Œdipus Coloneus*, the most beautiful, at least the most perfect, of his tragedies. He survived Euripides, his most formidable rival, of whom, also, we must speak a few words.

It is observed by Schlegel, that the tone of the tragedies of Euripides approaches more nearly to modern taste than to the stern simplicity of his predecessors. The passion of love predominates in his pieces, and he is the first tragedian who paid tribute to that sentiment

which has been too exclusively made the moving cause of interest on the modern stage,—the first who sacrificed to

> Cupid, king of gods and men.

The dramatic use of this passion has been purified in modern times, by the introduction of that tone of feeling, which, since the age of chivalry, has been a principal ingredient in heroic affection. This was unknown to the ancients, in whose society females, generally speaking, held a low and degraded place, from which few individuals emerged, unless those who aspired to the talents and virtues proper to the masculine sex. Women were not forbidden to become competitors for the laurel or oaken crown offered to genius and to patriotism; but antiquity held out no myrtle wreath, as a prize for the domestic virtues peculiar to the female character. Love, therefore, in Euripides, does not always breathe purity of sentiment, but is stained with the mixture of violent and degrading passions. This, however, was the fault of the age, rather than of the poet, although he is generally represented as an enemy of the female sex; and his death was ascribed to a judgment of Venus.

> When blood-hounds met him by the way,
> And monsters made the bard their prey.

This great dramatist was less successful than Sophocles in the construction of his plots; and, instead of the happy expedients by which his predecessor introduces us to the business of the drama, he had too often recourse to the mediation of a prologue, who came forth to explain, in detail, the previous history necessary to understand the piece.

Euripides is also accused of having degraded the character of his personages, by admitting more alloy of human weakness, folly, and vice, than was consistent with the high qualities of the heroic age. Æschylus, it was said, transported his audience into a new and more sublime race of beings; Sophocles painted man-

kind as they ought to be, and Euripides as they actually are. Yet the variety of character introduced by the latter tragedian, and the interest of his tragedies, must always attract the modern reader, coloured as they are by a tone of sentiment, and by his knowledge of the business, rules, and habits, of actual life, to which his predecessors, living as they did, in an imaginary and heroical world of their own, appear to have been strangers. And although the judgment of the ancients assigned the pre-eminence in tragedy to Æschylus or Sophocles, yet Euripides has been found more popular with posterity than either of his two great predecessors.

The division betwixt tragedy and comedy, for both sprung from the same common origin, the feasts, namely, in honour of Bacchus, and the disguises adopted by his worshippers, seems to have taken place gradually until the jests and frolics, which made a principal part of these revels, were found misplaced when introduced with graver matter, and were made by Susarion, perhaps, the subject of a separate province of the Drama. The Grecian comedy was divided into the ancient, the middle, and the modern, style of composition.

The ancient and original comedy was of a kind which may, at first sight, appear to derogate from the religious purposes which we have pointed out as the foundation of the Drama. The writings under this head frequently turn upon parodies, in which the persons and adventures of those gods and heroes who were the sublime subjects of the tragic Drama, are introduced for the purpose of buffoon-sport, and ridicule, as in Carey's modern farces of *Midas* and the *Golden Pippin*. Hercules appears in one of those pieces astonishing his host by an extravagant appetite, which the cook in vain attempts to satiate, by placing before him, in succession, all the various dishes which the ancient kitchen afforded. In another comedy, Bacchus (in whose honour the solemnity was instituted) is brought in only in order to ridicule his extreme cowardice.

At other times, allowing a grotesque fancy its wildest range, the early comic authors introduced upon the

stage animals, and even inanimate things, as part of their *dramatis personæ*, and embodied forth on the stage, the fantastic imaginations of Lucian in his *True History*. The golden age was represented in the same ridiculous and bizarre mode of description as the *Pays de la Cocagne* of the French minstrels, or the popular ideas of *Lubberland* in England: and the poets furnished kingdoms of birds and worlds in the moon.

Had the only charm of these entertainments consisted in the fantastic display with which the eyes of the spectators were regaled at the expense of the over-excited imagination of the poet, they would soon have fallen into disuse; for the Athenians were too acute and judicious critics, to have been long gratified with mere extravagance. But these grotesque scenes were made the medium for throwing the most bold and daring ridicule upon the measures of the state, upon the opinions of individuals, and upon the religion of the country.

This propensity to turn into ridicule that which is most serious and sacred, had probably its origin in the rude gambols of the sylvan deities who accompanied Bacchus, and to whose petulant and lively demeanour rude jest was a natural accompaniment. The audience, at least the more ignorant part of them, saw these parodies with pleasure, which equalled the awe they felt at the performance of the tragedies, whose most solemn subjects were thus burlesqued; nor do they appear to have been checked by any sense that their mirth was profane. In fact, when the religion of a nation comes to consist chiefly in the practice of a few unmeaning ceremonies, it is often found that the populace, with whatever inconsistency, assume the liberty of profaning them by grotesque parodies, without losing their reverence for the superstitions which they thus vilify. Customs of a like tendency were common in the middle ages. The festival of the Ass in France, of the Boy-Bishop in England, of the Abbot of Unreason in Scotland, and many other popular practices of the same kind, exhibited, in countries yet Catholic, daring parodies of the most sacred services and ceremonies of the Roman Church. And as these were practised openly,

and under authority, without being supposed to shake the people's attachment to the rites which they thus ridiculed, we cannot wonder that similar profanities were well received among the Pagans, whose religion sat very loosely upon them, and who professed no fixed or necessary articles of faith.

It is probable, that, had the old Grecian comedy continued to direct its shafts of ridicule only against the inhabitants of Olympus, it would not have attracted the coercion of the magistracy. But its kingdom was far more extensive, and the poets claiming the privilege of laying their opinions on public affairs before the people in this shape, Cratinus, Eupolis, and particularly Aristophanes, a daring, powerful, and apparently unprincipled writer, converted comedy into an engine for assailing the credit and character of private individuals, as well as the persons and political measures of those who administered the state. The doctrines of philosophy, the power of the magistrate, the genius of the poet, the rites proper to the Deity, were alternately made the subject of the most uncompromising and severe satire. It was soon discovered, that the more directly personal the assault could be made, and the more revered or exalted the personage, the greater was the malignant satisfaction of the audience, who loved to see wisdom, authority, and religious reverence, brought down to their own level, and made subjects of ridicule by the powers of the merciless satirist. The use of the mask enabled Aristophanes to render his satire yet more pointedly personal; for, by forming it so as to imitate, probably with some absurd exaggeration, the features of the object of his ridicule, and by imitating the dress and manner of the original, the player stepped upon the stage, a walking and speaking caricature of the hero of the night, and was usually placed in some ludicrous position, amidst the fanciful and whimsical chimeras with which the scene was peopled.

In this manner, Aristophanes ridiculed with equal freedom Socrates, the wisest of the Athenians, and Cleon, the demagogue, when at the height of his power. As no one durst perform the latter part, for fear of

giving offence to one so powerful, the author acted Cleon himself, with his face smeared with the lees of wine. Like the satire of Rabelais, the political and personal invective of Aristophanes was mingled with a plentiful allowance of scurril and indecent jests, which were calculated to ensure a favourable reception from the bulk of the people. He resembles Rabelais, also, in the wild and fanciful fictions which he assumes as the vehicle of his satire; and his comedy of The Birds may even have given hints to Swift, when, in order to contrast the order of existing institutions with those of a Utopian and fantastic fairy land, he carries Gulliver among giants and pigmies. Yet though his indecency, and the offensive and indiscriminate scurrility of his satire, deserve censure; though he merits the blame of the wise for his attack upon Socrates, and of the learned for his repeated and envenomed assaults on Euripides, Aristophanes has nevertheless added one deathless name to the deathless period in which he flourished; and, from the richness of his fancy, and gaiety of his tone, has deserved the title of the Father of Comedy. When the style of his sarcasm possessed the rareness of novelty, it was considered of so much importance to the state, that a crown of olive was voted to the poet, as one who had taught Athens the defects of her public men. But unless angels were to write satires, ridicule cannot be considered as the test of truth. The temptation to be witty is just so much the more resistless, that the author knows he will get no thanks for suppressing the jest which rises to his pen. As the public becomes used to this new and piquant fare, fresh characters must be sacrificed for its gratification. Recrimination adds commonly to the contest, and those who were at first ridiculed out of mere wantonness of wit, are soon persecuted for resenting the ill usage; until literature resembles an actual personal conflict, where the victory is borne away by the strongest and most savage, who deals the most desperate wounds with the least sympathy for the feeling of his adversary.

The ancient comedy was of a character too licentious

to be long tolerated. Two or three decrees having been in vain passed, in order to protect the citizens against libels of this poignant description, the ancient comedy was finally proscribed by that oligarchy, which assumed the sway over Athens, upon the downfall of the popular government towards the end of the Peloponnesian war. By order of these rulers, Anaxander, an actor, was punished capitally, for parodying a line of Euripides, so as to infer a slight of the government. He was starved to death, to which, as an appropriate punishment, the public has since his time often indirectly condemned both actors and dramatists. Aristophanes, who was still alive, bowed to the storm, and relinquished the critical and satirical scourge, which he had hitherto exercised in the combined capacity of satirist, reformer, and reviewer; and the use of the Chorus was prohibited to comic authors, as it seems to have been in their stanzas chiefly that the offensive satire was invested. To this edict Horace alludes in the well-known lines:

> "Successit vetus his comedia, non sine multâ
> Laude, sed in vitium libertas excidit, et vim
> Dignam lege regi: lex est accepta: Chorusque
> Turpiter obticuit, sublato jure nocendi."*

In the middle comedy, Thalia and her votaries seemed to have retraced their steps, and, avoiding personal satire, resorted once more to general subjects of burlesque raillery. We learn from history, real or fabulous, or from the works of the elder poets, that these plays had the fanciful wildness without the personal satire of the ancient comedy, for the authors were obliged to take care that there was no "offence" in their pleasantry. At most, they only ventured to touch on matters of instant interest in the way of inuendo, un-

> * The ancient comedy next play'd its part,
> Well-famed, at first, for spirit and for art;
> But Liberty o'erleaping decent awe,
> Satiric rage required restraint from law.
> The edict spoke,—dishonour'd silence bound
> The Chorus, and forbade their ancient right to wound.

der feigned titles and oblique hints, and had no longer the audacity to join men's vices or follies to their names. Aristophanes re-cast several of his pieces in this manner. But the same food, without the poignant seasoning to which the audience had been accustomed, palled on their taste, and this cast of pieces soon gave place to that which the ancients called the New Comedy, so successfully cultivated by Menander and others.

Notwithstanding what modern critics have said to the contrary, and particularly the ingenious Schlegel, the new tone which comedy thus assumed, seems more congenial to true taste as well as to public decorum, and even to the peace and security of the community, than that of Aristophanes, whose satiric wit, like a furious bull, charged upon his countrymen without respect or distinction, and tossed and gored whatever he met with in his way.

The new comedy had for its object the ludicrous incidents of private life,—*celebrare domestica facta*, says Horace,—to detail those foibles, follies, and whimsical accidents, which are circumstances material and serious to the agents themselves, but, as very usually happens on the stage of the world, matters only of ludicrous interest to the on-lookers. The new comedy admitted also many incidents of a character not purely ludicrous, and some which, calling forth pathetic emotion, approached more nearly to the character of tragedy than had been admitted in the ancient comedies of Aristophanes, and in this rather resembled what the French have called *Tragedie Bourgeoise*. It is scarce necessary to remark, that the line cannot be always distinctly drawn betwixt the subjects which excite mirth and those which call forth sympathy. It often happens that the same incident is at once affecting and ludicrous, or admits of being presented alternately in either point of view. In a Drama, also, which treats of the faults and lighter vices, as well as of the follies of mankind, it is natural that the author should sometimes assume the high tone of the moralist. In these cases, to use the language of Horace, comedy exalts her voice, and the offended father, the pantaloon of the piece, swells into

sublimity of language. A pleasant species of composition was thus attained, in which wit and humour were relieved by touches both of sentiment and moral instruction. The new comedy, taken in this enlarged point of view, formed the introduction to the Modern Drama; but it was neither so comprehensive in its plan, nor so various in character and interest.

The form which the Greeks, and in imitation of them the Romans, adopted, for embodying their comic effusions, was neither extended nor artificial. To avoid the charge of assaulting, or perhaps the temptation to attack private persons, the actors in their drama were rather painted as personifications of particular classes of society, than living individual characters. The list of these personages was sufficiently meagre. The principal character, upon whose devices and ingenuity the whole plot usually turns, is the Geta of the piece, a witty, roguish, insinuating, and malignant slave, the confidant of a wild and extravagant son, whom he aids in his pious endeavours to cheat a suspicious, severe, and griping father. When to these three are added, a wily courtezan, a procuress, a stolen virgin, who is generally a mute, or nearly such, we have all the stock-characters which are proper to the classic comedy. Upon this limited scale of notes the ancients rung their changes, relieving them occasionally, however, by the introduction of a boastful soldier, a boorish clown, or a mild and good-natured old man, to contrast with the irascible Chremes of the piece, the more ordinary representative of old age.

The plot is in general as simple as the cast of the characters. A father loses his child, who falls into the hands of a procuress or slave-merchant. The efforts of the youth, who falls in love with this captive, to ransom her from her captivity, are seconded by the slave, who aids him in the various devices necessary to extort from his father the funds necessary for the purchase, and their tricks form the principal part of the intrigue. When it is necessary that the play shall close, the discovery of the girl's birth takes place, and the young couple are married. The plots are, indeed, sometimes

extended or enlarged by additional circumstances, but very seldom by any novelty of character or variety of general form.

It is a necessary consequence, that the ancient comic authors were confined within a very narrow compass. The vast and inexhaustible variety of knavery, folly, affectation, humour, &c. &c. as mingled with each other, or as modified by difference of age, sex, temper, education, profession, and habit of body, are all within the royalty of the modern comic dramatist, and he may summon them up under what limitations, and in what circumstances he pleases, to play their parts in his piece. The ancients were much more limited in their circle of materials, and, perhaps, we must look for the ruling cause, once more, in the great size of their theatres, and to the use of the mask; which, though it easily presented the general or generic character of the personage introduced, was incapable of the endless variety which can be given to ridicule of a more minute, refined, and personal kind, by the flexible organs of a modern actor.

But besides this powerful reason for refraining from any attempt to draw characters distinguished by peculiar habits, there is much reason to think that the mode of life pursued by the ancient Athenians was unfavourable to the formation of whimsical, original, or eccentric characters. Citizens of the same state, they lived in the habits of familiar intercourse with each other, and the differences of ranks did not make the same distinction in taste and manners as in modern Europe. The occupation, also, of Grecian citizens had a uniform and national character. They were all public men, and had a common interest in the management of the state; and it probably followed, that, in men whose thoughts and pursuits were all bent the same way, the same general similarity of manners might be found to exist, which is remarked in those who follow the same profession. The differences of youth and age, of riches and poverty, of good or bad temper, &c. must have been much modified in Attica, where all free citizens were, to a certain degree, on a level,—discussed

the same topics of state, and gave their votes in the same popular assemblies,—enjoyed without restriction the same public amusements,—and where the same general cast of manners might descend to the lowest of the citizens, for the very reason that even a poor herb-woman understood the delicacy of the Attic dialect so perfectly, as to distinguish a stranger by the first words he addressed to her.

The Chorus, silenced, as we have seen, owing to the license of the old comedy, made no appendage to that which was substituted in its place. The exhibition of the Grecian comedy did not, in other respects, in so far as we know, materially differ from that of the tragedy. Instead of the choral interludes, the representation was now divided, by intervals of cessation, into acts, as upon the modern stage. And the number five seems to have been fixed upon as the most convenient and best adapted for the purposes of representation. The plot, as we have seen, and the distinct and discriminated specification of character, were, in either case, subordinate considerations to the force of style and composition. It follows, of consequence, that we can better understand and enjoy the tragedies than the comedies of the ancients. The circumstances which excite sublime or terrific sensations are the same, notwithstanding the difference of age, country, and language. But comic humour is of a character much more evanescent. The force of wit depends almost entirely upon time, circumstance, and manners; in so much, that a jest which raises inextinguishable laughter in a particular class of society, appears flat or disgusting if uttered in another. It is, therefore, no wonder that the ancient comedy, turning upon manners so far removed from our own time, should appear to us rather dull and inartificial. The nature of the intercourse between the sexes in classic times was also unfavourable for comedy. The coquette, the fine lady, the romp, all those various shades of the female character, which occupy so many pleasant scenes on the modern stage, were totally unknown to ancient manners. The wife of the ancient comedy was a mere

household drudge, the vassal, not the companion, of an imperious husband. The young woman whose beauty is the acting motive of the intrigue, never evinces the slightest intellectual property of any kind. And the only female character admitting of some vivacity, is that of the courtezan, whose wit as well as her charms appear to have been professional.

After substracting the large field afforded by female art or caprice, female wit, or folly, or affection, the realm of the ancient comedy will appear much circumscribed; and we have yet to estimate a large deduction to be made on account of the rust of antiquity, and the total change of religion and manners. It is no wonder, therefore, that the wit of Plautus and Terence should come forth diminished in weight and substance, after having been subjected to the alembic of modern criticism. That which survives the investigation, however, is of a solid and valuable character. If these Dramas do not entertain us with a display of the specific varieties of character, they often convey maxims evincing a deep knowledge of human passion and feeling; and are so admirably adapted to express, in few and pithy words, truths which it is important to remember, that even the Apostle Paul himself has not disdained to quote a passage from a Grecian dramatist. The situation, also, of their personages is often truly comic; and the modern writers who have borrowed their ideas, and arranged them according to the taste of their own age, have often been indebted to the ancients for the principal cause of their success.

Having dwelt thus long upon the Grecian Drama, we are entitled to treat with conciseness that of Rome, which, like the other fine arts, that people, whose national disposition was much more martial than literary, copied from their more ingenious neighbours.

The Romans were not, indeed, without a sort of rude dramatic representation of their own, of the same nature with that which, as we have already noticed, usually rises in an early period of society. These were called *Fabulæ Atellanæ;* farces, for such they were, which

took their name from *Atella*, a town belonging to the *Osci* in Italy. They were performed by the Roman youth, who used to attack each other with satirical couplets during the intervals of some rude game, in which they seem to have represented the character of fabulous antiquity. But 361 years before the Christian era, the Romans, in the time of a great pestilence, as we learn from Livy, introduced a more regular species of theatrical entertainment, in order to propitiate the deities by a solemn exhibition of public games; after which, what had hitherto been matter of mere frolic and amusement, assumed, according to the historian, the appearance of a professional art; and the Roman youth, who had hitherto appeared as amateur performers, gave up the stage to regular actors.

These plays continued, however, to be of a very rude structure, until the Grecian stage was transplanted to Rome. Livius Andronicus, by birth a Grecian, led the way in this improvement, and is accounted her first dramatist.

Seneca, the philosopher, is the only Roman tragedian whose works have reached our time. His tragedies afford no very favourable specimen of Roman art. They are in the false taste which succeeded the age of Augustus, and debased the style of composition in that of Nero; bombastic, tedious, and pedantic; treating, indeed, of Grecian subjects, but not with Grecian art.

By a singular contrast, although we have lost the more valuable tragedies of Rome, we have been compelled to judge of the new Greek comedy, through the medium of the Latin translations. Of Menander we have but a few fragments, and our examples of his Drama are derived exclusively from Plautus and Terence. Of these, the former appears the more original, the latter the more elegant author. The comedies of Plautus are much more connected with manners,—much more full of what may be termed drollery and comic situation,—and are believed to exhibit a greater portion of Roman character. The Romans, indeed, had two species of comedy, the *Palliata*, where the scene and dress were Grecian; the *Togata*, where both were Roman. But besides this

distinction, even the *Mantled*, or Grecian comedy, might be more or less of a Roman cast; and Plautus is supposed to have infused a much stronger national tone into his plays than can be traced in those of Terence. They are also of a ruder cast, and more extravagant, retaining, perhaps, a larger portion of the rough horseplay peculiar to the *Fabulæ Atellanæ*. Terence, on the contrary, is elegant, refined, and sententious; decorous and regular in the construction of his plots; exhibiting more of wit in his dialogue, than of comic force in his situations; grave often and moral; sometimes even pathetic; and furnishing, upon the whole, the most perfect specimens of the Grecian comedy, both in action and character.

The alterations which the Romans made in the practice of the theatrical art do not seem to have been of great consequence. One circumstance, however, deserves notice. The orchestra, or, as we should say, the pit of the theatre, was no longer left vacant for the occasional occupation of the Chorus, but was filled with the senators, knights, and other more respectable citizens. The stage was thus brought more near to the eye of the higher class of the audience. It would also seem that the theatres were smaller; for we read of two so constructed, that each turned upon a pivot, so that, when placed back to back, they were separate theatres, yet were capable of being wheeled round, with all the audience, so as to bring their oblong ends together, then forming a single ampitheatre, in which the games of the circus succeeded to dramatic representation. It is not easy to conceive the existence of such machinery; but the story, at any rate, seems to show, that their theatres must have been greatly smaller than those of Greece, to admit the supposition of such an evolution as being in any degree practicable. This diminution in the size of the house, and the occupation of the orchestra by the most dignified part of the audience, may have afforded a reason why masks were, at least occasionally, disused on the Roman stage. That they were sometimes disused is certain; for Cicero mentions Roscius Gallus as using a mask to conceal a deformity arising from the inequality

of his eyes, which implies plainly that other comedians played with their faces disclosed. It is therefore probable, that the imperfections of the mask were felt, so soon as the distance was diminished between the performer and the spectators; and we may hazard a conjecture, that this disguise was first laid aside in the smaller theatres.

But the principal change introduced by the Romans into the Drama, and which continues to affect it in every country of Europe, respected the *status* or rank of the actors in society. We have seen that Athens, enthusiastic in her attachment to the fine arts, held no circumstances degrading which were connected with them. Æschylus and Sophocles were soldiers and statesmen, yet lost nothing in the opinion of their countrymen, by appearing on the public stage. Euripides, who was also a person of consequence, proved that "love esteems no office mean;" for he danced in a female disguise in his own Drama, and that not as the Princess Nauticlea, but as one of her handmaidens, or, in modern phrase, as a *figurante*. The Grecians, therefore, attached no dishonour to the person of the actor, nor esteemed that he who contributed to giving the amusement of the theatre, was at all degraded beneath those who received it. It was otherwise in Rome. The contempt which the Romans entertained for players might be founded partly upon their confounding this elegant amusement with the games of the Circus and Amphitheatre, performed by gladiators and slaves, the meanest, in short, of mankind. Hence, to use the words of St. Augustin, "the ancient Romans, accounting the art of stage-playing and the whole scene infamous, ordained that this sort of men should not only want the honour of other citizens, but also be disfranchised and thrust out of their tribe, by a legal and disgraceful censure, which the censors were to execute; because they would not suffer their vulgar sort of people, much less their senators, to be defamed, disgraced, or defiled with stage-players;" which act of theirs he styles "an excellent true Roman prudence, to be enumerated among the Roman's praises."

Accordingly, an edict of the prætor stigmatized as infamous all who appeared on the stage, either to speak or act; but it is remarkable that from this general proscription the Roman youth were excepted; and they continued to enact the *Fabulæ Atellanæ*, namely, the farces or drolleries of ancient Italian origin, without incurring any stigma. This exception seems to indicate, that the edict originated in the national pride of the Romans, and their contempt for Grecian literature, and for foreigners of every description. Under any other view it is impossible they should have preferred the actors in these coarse farces, who, by the by, are supposed to have been the originals of no less persons than Harlequin and Punchinello, to those who possessed taste and talents sufficient to execute the masterly scenes borrowed from the Grecian Drama.

Injustice, however,—and we call that law unjust which devotes to general infamy any profession of which it nevertheless tolerates the practice,—is usually inconsistent. Several individual play-actors in Rome rose to high public esteem, and to the enjoyment of great wealth. Roscius was the friend and companion of Piso and of Sylla, and, what was still more to his credit, of Cicero himself, who thus eulogises the scenic art, while commemorating the merit of his deceased friend:—*Quis nostrum tam animo agresti ac duro fuit, ut Roscii morte nuper non commoveretur? qui quum esset senex mortuus, tamen, propter excellentem artem ac venustatem, videbatur omnino mori non debuisse.*

Paris, another Roman actor, reached a height of celebrity as distinguished as Roscius, and exercised, as many of his profession have since done, an arbitrary authority over the unfortunate dramatic authors. It is recorded by the satirist, that Statius the epic poet might have starved, had he not given up to this favourite of the public, upon his own terms doubtless, the manuscript of an unacted performance. Paris was put to death by Domitian out of jealousy.

If the actors rose to be persons of importance in Rome, the dramatic critics were not less so. They had formed a code of laws for the regulation of dramatic

authors, to which the great names of Aristotle and Horace both contributed their authority. But these will be more properly treated of when we come to mention the adoption of the ancient regulations by the French stage.

Having thus gone hastily through some account of the ancient stage, from its rise in Greece to its transportation to Rome, we have only to notice the circumstances under which it expired.

Christianity from its first origin was inimical to the institution of the stage. The Fathers of the Church inveigh against the profaneness and immodesty of the theatre. In the treatise of Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, he has written expressly upon the subject. The various authorities on this head have been collected and quoted by the enemies of the stage, from Prynne down to Collier. It ought, however, to be noticed, that their exprobration of the theatre is founded, first, upon its origin, as connected with heathen superstition; and secondly, on the beastly and abominable license practised in the pantomimes, which, although they made no part of the regular Drama, were presented nevertheless in the same place, and before the same audience. "We avoid your shows and games," says Tertullian, "because we doubt the warrant of their origin. They savour of superstition and idolatry, and we dislike the entertainment, as abhorring the heathen religion on which it is founded." In another place he observes, the temples were united to theatres, in order that superstition might patronise debauchery, and that they were dedicated to Bacchus and to Venus, the confederate deities of lust and intemperance.

It was not only the connexion of the theatre with heathen superstition, that offended the primitive church; but also the profligacy of some of the entertainments which were exhibited. There cannot be much objected to the regular Roman Dramas in this particular, since even Mr. Collier allows them to be more decorous than the British stage of his own time; but, as we have already hinted, in the *Ludi Scenici*, the intrigues of the

gods and the heroes were represented upon the stage with the utmost grossness. These obscene and scandalous performances thus far coincided with the Drama, that they were acted in the same theatres, and in honour of the same deities, and both were subjected to the same sweeping condemnation. They were not, however, absolutely or formally abolished, even when Christianity became the religion of the state. Tertullian and St. Austin both speak of the scenic representations of their own day, under the distinct characters of tragedy and comedy; and although condemned by the church, and abhorred by the more strict Christians, there is little doubt that the ancient theatre continued to exist, until it was buried under the ruins of the Roman Empire.

MODERN DRAMA.

The same propensity to fictitious personification, which we have remarked as common to all countries, introduced, during the dark ages, a rude species of Drama, into most of the nations of Europe. Like the first effort of the ancients in that art, it had its foundation in religion; with this great difference, that as the rites of Bacchus before, and even after the improvements introduced by Thespis, were well enough suited to the worship of such a deity, the religious Dramas, mysteries, or whatever other name they assumed, were often so unworthy of the Christian religion on which they were founded, that their being tolerated can be attributed only to the gross ignorance of the laity, and the cunning of the Catholic priesthood, who used them, with other idle and sometimes indecorous solemnities, as one means of amusing the people's minds, and detaining them in contented bondage to their spiritual superiors.

In the Empire of the East, religious exhibitions of a theatrical character appear to have been instituted about the year 990, by Theophylact, patriarch of Constantinople, with the intention (Warton surmises) of weaning the minds of the people from the Pagan revels,

by substituting Christian spectacles, partaking of the same spirit of license. His contemporaries give him little credit for his good intentions. "Theophylact," says Cedrenus, as translated by Warton, "introduced the practice, which prevails to this day, of scandalizing God and the memory of his saints, on the most splendid and popular festivals, by indecent and ridiculous songs, and enormous shoutings, even in the midst of those sacred hymns which we ought to offer to divine grace for the salvation of our souls. But he having collected a company of base fellows, and placing over them one Euthynicus surnamed Casnes, whom he also appointed the superintendent of his church, admitted into the sacred service diabolical dances, exclamations of ribaldry, and ballads borrowed from the streets and brothels."—The irregularities of the Greek clergy, who, on certain holidays, personated feigned characters, and entered even the choir in masquerade, are elsewhere mentioned. (Warton's *History of English Poetry*, vol. II. p. 370.) These passages do not prove that actual mysteries or sacred Dramas were enacted on such occasions; but probably the indecent revels alluded to bore the same relation to such representations, as the original rites of Bacchus to the more refined exhibitions of Thespis and Susarion.

There has been some dispute among theatrical antiquaries, in which country of Europe dramatic representations of a religious kind first appeared. The liberal and ingenious editor of the *Chester Mysteries* has well remarked, (in his introduction to that curious and beautiful volume,) that a difficulty must always attend the enquiry, from the doubts that exist, whether the earliest recorded performances of each country were merely pantomimes, or were accompanied with dialogue.

The practice of processions and pageants with music, in which characters, chiefly of sacred writ, were presented before the public, is so immediately connected with that of speaking exhibitions, that it is difficult to discriminate the one from the other.

We are tempted to look first to Italy; as it is natural

that the tragic art should have revived in that country in which it was last exercised, and where traditions, and perhaps some faint traces, of its existence were still preserved.

"The first speaking sacred Dramas," says Mr. Walker, "was *Della Passione di nostro Signore Gesu Christo*, by Giuliano Dati, Bishop of San Leo, who flourished about the year 1445." (Walker's *Essay on the Revival of the Drama in Italy*, p. 6.) This elegant author does, indeed, show that Italian scholars, and particularly Mussato, the Paduan historian, had composed two Latin Dramas upon something like the classical model, about the year 1300. Yet, although his play upon the tyranny and death of Ezzlino obtained him both reputation and honour, it does not appear to have been composed for representation on the stage, but rather to have been a dramatic poem, since the progress of the piece is often interrupted by the poet speaking in his own person.

The French Drama is traced by M. Le Grand as high as the thirteenth century; and he has produced one curious example of a pastoral, entitled, *Un Jeu*. He mentions also a farce, two devotional pieces, and two moralities, to each of which he ascribes the same title. It may be suspected, that these are only dialogues recited by the travelling minstrels and troubadours; such as Petrarch acknowledges having sometimes composed for the benefit of the strolling musicians. Such were probably the spectacles exhibited by Philip the Fair in 1313, in celebration of the honour of knighthood conferred on his children. Ricoboni, anxious for the honour of Italy, denies to these amusements the character of a legitimate Drama; with what justice we have no information that can enable us to decide.

Amidst this uncertainty, it is not unpleasant to record the fair claim which Britain possesses to be one of the earliest, if not the very first nation in which dramatic representation seems to have been revived. The *Chester Mysteries*, called the *Whitsun Plays*, appear to have been performed during the mayoralty of John Arneway, who filled that office in Chester from 1268 to

1276. The very curious specimen of these mysteries, which has been of late printed for private distribution by Mr. Markland of the Temple, furnishes us with the banes or proclamation, containing the history and character of the pageants which it announces.

Reverende lordes and ladyes all,
That at this tyme here assembled bee,
By this messuage understande you shall,
That sometymes there was mayor of this citie,
Sir John Arnway, Knyghte, who most worthilye
Contented hymselfe to sett out an playe
The devise of one Done Randal, moonke of Chester Abbey.

This moonke, moonke-like in scriptures well seene,
In storyes travelled with the best sorte;
In pagentes set fourth, apparently to all eyne,
The Olde and Newe Testament with livelye comforte;
Intermynglinge therewith, onely to make sporte,
Some things not warranted by any writt,
Which to gladd the hearers he woulde men to take yt.

This matter he abrevited into playes twenty-foure,
And every playe of the matter gave but a taste,
Leavinge for better learninge circumstances to accomplishe,
For his proceedinges maye appeare to be in haste:
Yet all together unprofitable his labour he did not waste,
For at this daye, and ever, he deserveth the fame
Which all moonkes deserves professinge that name.

This worthy Knyghte Arnway, then mayor of this citie,
This order toke, as declare to you I shall,
That by twentye-fower occupations, artes, craftes, or misteries,
These pagentes shoulde be played after breeffe rehearsall;
For every pagente a cariage to be provyded withall,
In which sorte we purpose this Whitsontyde,
Our pagentes into three partes to devyde.

I. Now you worshippful TANNERS that of custome olde
The fall of Lucifer did set out,
Some writers awarrante your matter, therefore be boulde
Lustelye to playe the same to all the rowtte:
And yf any thereof stand in any doubte,
Your author his author hath, your shewe let bee,
Good speech, fyne players, with apparill comelye.

(*Chester Mysteries.*)

Such were the celebrated Mysteries of Chester. To

Mr. Markland's extracts from them is prefixed a curious dissertation upon their age and author; and the subject has received yet further, and most interesting illustration from a learned antiquarian dissertation on the subject by Thomas Sharpe, Esq., published at Coventry, in 1825. They were so highly popular as to be ranked in the estimation of the vulgar with the ballads of Robin Hood; for a character in one of the old moralities is introduced as boasting,

> I can rhimes of Robin Hood, and Randal of Chester,
> But of our Lord and our Lady I can nought at all.

The poetical value of these mysteries is never considerable, though they are to be found among the dramatic antiquities of all parts of Europe. It was, however, soon discovered that the purity of the Christian religion was inconsistent with these rude games, in which passages from Scripture were profanely and indecently mingled with human inventions of a very rude, and sometimes an indecorous character. To the Mysteries, therefore, succeeded the Moralities, a species of dramatic exercise, which involved more art and ingenuity, and was besides much more proper for a public amusement, than the imitations or rather parodies of Sacred History, which had hitherto entertained the public.

These Moralities bear some analogy to the old or original comedy of the ancients. They were often founded upon allegorical subjects, and almost always bore a close and poignant allusion to the incidents of the day. Public reformation was their avowed object, and, of course, satire was frequently the implement which they employed. Dr. Percy, however, remarks that they were of two characters, serious and ludicrous; the one approaching to the tragedy, the other to the comedy of classical times; so that they brought taste as it were to the threshold of the real Drama. The difference betwixt the Catholic and reformed religion was fiercely disputed in some of these Dramas; and in Scotland, in particular, a mortal blow was aimed at the superstitions of the Roman Church, by the celebrated Sir David

Lindsay, in a play or Morality acted in 1539, and entitled *The Satire of the Three Estates.* The objects of this Drama were entirely political, although it is mixed with some comic scenes, and introduced by an interlude, in coarseness altogether unmatched. The spirit of Aristophanes, in all its good and evil, seems to have actuated the Scottish King-at-arms. It is a singular proof of the liberty allowed to such representations at the period, that James V. and his queen repeatedly witnessed a piece, in which the corruptions of the existing government and religion were treated with such satirical severity. The play, as acted, seems to have differed in some respects from the state in which it exists in manuscript.

In a letter to the Lord Privy Seal of England, dated 26th January 1540, SIR WILLIAM EURE (ENVOY FROM HENRY VIII.) gives the following account of the play, as it had then been performed "in the feast of Ephipanie at Lightgowe, before the king, queene, and the whole counsaile, spirituall and temporall.—In the firste entres come in SOLACE (whose parte was but to make mery, sing ballets with his fellowes, and drink at the interluydes of the play,) whoe showed firste to all the audience the play to be played. Next come in a king, who passed to his throne, having nae speche to thende of the play, and then to ratify and approve, as in Parliament, all things done by the rest of the players, which represented THE THREE ESTATES. With him came his cortiers, PLACEBO, PICTHANK, and FLATTERYE, and sic alike gard; one swering he was the lustiest, starkeste, best proportionit, and most valyeant man that ever was; ane other swore he was the beste with longbowe, crosse-bowe, and culverin, and so fourth. Thairafter there come a man armed in harness, with a swerde drawn in his hande, a BUSHOP, a BURGES-MAN, and EXPERIENCE, clede like a DOCTOR: who set them all down on the deis under the KING. After them come a POOR MAN, who did go up and down the scaffolde, making a hevie complainte that he was hereyet, throw the courtiers taking his fewe in one place, and his tackes in another; wherthrough he had sceyled his

house, his wyfe and childrene beggyng thair brede, and so of many thousands in Scotland; saying thair was no remedy to be gotten, as he was neither acquainted with controller nor treasurer. And then he looked to the King, and said he was not King in Scotland, for there was ane other King in Scotland that hanged JOHNE ARMSTRANG, with his fellowes, SYM THE LAIRD, and mony other mae; but he had lefte ane thing undone. Then he made a long narracione of the oppression of the poor, by the taking of the corse-presaunte beists, and of the herrying of poor men by the consistorye lawe, and of many other abusions of the SPIRITUALITIE and Church. Then the BUSHOP raise and rebuked him. Then the MAN OF ARMES alledged the contraire, and commanded the poor man to go on. The poor man proceeds with a long list of the bishop's evil practices, the vices of cloisters, &c. This proved by EXPERIENCE, who, from a New Testament, shows the office of a bushop. The MAN OF ARMES and the BURGES approve of all that was said against the clergy, and alledge the expediency of a reform, with the consent of Parliament. The BUSHOP dissents. The MAN OF ARMES and the BURGES said they were two, and he but one, wherefore their voice should have most effect. Thereafter the King, in the play, ratified, approved, and confirmed all that was rehersed."

The other nations of Europe, as well as England, had their Mysteries and Moralities. In France, Boileau, following Menestrier, imputes the introduction of these spectacles to travelling bands of pilgrims.

> Chez nos devots ayeux, le théâtre abhorré
> Fut long-temps dans la France un plaisir ignoré:
> Des pelerins, dit-on, une troupe grossière
> En public à Paris y monta la première;
> Et sottement zélée, en sa simplicité
> Joüa les saints, la Vierge, et Dieu par pieté.
>
> *L'Art Poëtique*, Chant III.

In Spain the *Autos Sacramentales*, which are analogous to the Mysteries of the middle ages, are still presented without shocking a nation whose zeal is stronger than their taste; and, it is believed, such rude and

wild plays, founded on Scripture, are also occasionally acted in Flanders. In the *History of the Council of Constance*, we find that Mysteries were introduced into Germany by the English, about 1417, and were first performed to welcome the Emperor Sigismund, on his return from England; and, from the choice of the subjects, we should almost suppose, that they had transferred to that country the *Chester Mysteries* themselves. "Les Anglois," says the historian, "se signalèrent entre les autres par un spectacle nouveau, ou au moins inusité jusques alors en Allemagne. Ce fut une comédie sacrée que les Evêques Anglois firent représenter devant l'Empereur, le Dimanche 13 de Janvier, sur la Massacre des Innocens." (*Hist. du Concile de Constance*, par L'Enfant, lib. v.) The character of these rude dramatic essays renders them rather subjects for the antiquary, than a part of a history of the regular dramatic art.

We may also pass over, with brief notice, the Latin plays which, upon the revival of letters, many of the learned composed, in express imitation of the ancient Grecian and Roman productions. We have mentioned those of Mussato, who was followed by the more celebrated Cararo, in the path which he had opened to fame. In other countries the same example was followed. These learned prolusions, however, were only addressed to persons of letters, then a very circumscribed circle, and, when acted at all, were presented at universities or courts on solemn public occasions. They form no step in the history of the Drama, unless that, by familiarising the learned with the form and rules of the ancient classical Drama, they gradually paved the way for the adoption of similar regulations into the revived vernacular Drama, which, adopted by Italy and France, and rejected by Britain, Spain, and other countries, has formed a frequent subject of debate amongst dramatic critics.

While the learned laboured to revive the Classical Drama in all its purity, the public at large, to which the treasures of the learned languages were as a fountain sealed, became addicted to a species of representa-

tion which properly neither fell under the denomination of comedy or tragedy, but was named History or Historical Drama. Charles Verardo, who, about 1492, composed a Drama of this sort, in Latin, upon the expulsion of the Moors from Granada, claims, for this production, a total emancipation from the rules of dramatic criticism.

> Requirat autem nullus hic comediæ
> Leges ut observantur aut tragediæ;
> Agenda nempe est HISTORIA, non fabula.

"Let none expect that in this piece the rules of comedy or of tragedy should be observed; we mean to act a history, not a fable." From this expression it would seem, that, in a Historical Drama, the author did not think himself entitled to compress or alter the incidents as when the plot was fabulous, but was bound, to a certain extent, to conform to the actual course of events. In these histories, the subject often comprehended the life and death of a monarch, or some other period of history, containing several years of actual time, which, nevertheless, were made to pass before the eyes of the audience during the two or three hours usually allotted for the action of a play. It is not to be supposed that, with so fair a field open before them, and the applause of the audience for their reward, the authors of these histories should long have confined themselves to the matter-of-fact contained in records. They speedily innovated or added to their dramatic chronicles, without regard to the real history. To those who plead for stage-plays, that they elucidate and explain many dark and obscure histories, and fix the facts firmly in the minds of the audience, of which they had otherwise but an imperfect apprehension, the stern Prynne replies with great scorn, "that play-poets do not explain but sophisticate and deform good histories, with many false varnishes and playhouse fooleries;" and that "the histories are more accurately to be learned in the original authors who record them, than in derivative playhouse pamphlets, which corrupt them." Prynne's *Histrio-Mastix*, p. 940.

The dramatic chronicles, therefore, were a field in which the genius of the poet laboured to supply by character, sentiment, and incident, the meagre detail of the historian. They became so popular in England, that, during the short interval betwixt the revival of the stage and the appearance of Shakspeare, the most part of the English monarchs had lived and died upon the stage; and it is well-known, that almost all his historical plays were new written by him, upon the plan of old dramatic chronicles which already existed.

But the miscellaneous audience which crowded to the vernacular theatre at its revival in Europe, were of that rank and intellect which is apt to become tired of a serious subject, and to demand that a lamentable tragedy should be intermingled with very pleasant mirth. The poets, obliged to cater for all tastes, seldom failed to insert the humours of some comic character, that the low or grotesque scenes in which he was engaged, might serve as a relief to the graver passages of the Drama, and gratify the taste of those spectators who, like Christofero Sly, tired until the fool came on the stage again. Hence Sir Philip Sidney's censure on these dramatists, "how all their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings with clowns; not because the matter so carrieth it, but to thrust in the clown, by head and shoulders, to play a part in magestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion, so that neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragic-comedy attained." (*Defence of Poesie* Sidney's *Arcadia*, edit. 1627, p. 563.) "If we mark them well," he concludes, "funerals and horn-pipes seldom match daintily together."

The historical plays led naturally into another class, which may be called Romantic Dramas, founded upon popular poems or fictitious narratives, as the former were on real history. Some of these were borrowed from foreign nations, ready dramatized to the hand of the borrower; others were founded on the plans which occurred in the almost innumerable novels and roman-

ces which we had made our own by translation. "I may boldly say it," says Gosson, a recreant play-wright who attacked his former profession, "because I have seen it, that the *Palace of Pleasure*, the *Golden Asse*, the *Ethiopian History*, *Amadis of France*, the *Round Table*, *Bawdie Comedies in Latin*, *French*, *Italian*, *and Spanish*, have been thoroughly ransacked to furnish the playhouse in London." But it was not to be supposed that the authors would confine themselves to stricter rules in pieces founded upon Italian and Spanish novels, or upon romances of chivalry, than they had acted upon in the histories. Every circumstance which tended to loosen the reins of theatrical discipline, in the one case, existed in the other; and, accordingly, comedies of intrigue, and tragedies of action and show, every where superseded, at least in popular estimation, the severe and simple model of the Classical Drama.

It happened that in England and Spain, in particular, the species of composition which was most independent of critical regulation was supported by the most brilliant display of genius. Lopez de Vega and Calderon rushed on the stage with their hasty and high-coloured, but glowing productions, fresh from the mint of imagination, and scorning that the cold art of criticism should weigh them in her balance. The taste of the Spaniards has been proverbially inclined to the wild, the romantic, and the chivalrous; and the audience of their bards would not have parted with one striking scene, however inartificially introduced, to have gained for their favourites the praise of Aristotle and all his commentators. Lopez de Vega himself was not ignorant of critical rules; but he pleads the taste of his countrymen as an apology for neglecting those restrictions which he had observed in his earlier studies.

"Yet true it is I too have written plays,
The wiser few, who judge with skill, might praise;
But when I see how show and nonsense draws
The crowd's, and, more than all, the fair's applause;
Who still are forward with indulgent rage
To sanction every monster of the stage;
I, doom'd to write the public taste to hit,
Resume the barbarous dress 'twas vain to quit;

I lock up every rule before I write,
Plautus and Terence banish from my sight,
Lest rage should teach these injured wits to join,
And their dumb books cry shame on works like mine.
To vulgar standards, then, I frame my play,
Writing at ease; for, since the public pay,
'Tis just, methinks, we by their compass steer,
And write the nonsense that they love to hear."
LORD HOLLAND'S *Life of Lope de Vega*, p. 103.

The Spanish comedies of intrigue also went astray, as far as their romantic tragedies, from the classical path. In fact, these new representations were infinitely more captivating from their vivacity, novelty, and, above all, from their reflecting the actual spirit of the time, and holding the mirror up to nature, than the cold imitations which the learned wrote in emulation of the Classic Drama. The one class are existing and living pictures of the times in which the authors lived; the others, the cold resurrection of the lifeless corpses which had long slumbered in the tomb of antiquity. The spirit of chivalry, which so long lingered in Spain, breathes through the wild and often extravagant genius of her poets. The hero is brave and loyal, and true to his mistress:

A knight of love, who never broke a vow.

Lovers of this description, in whose minds the sexual passion is sublimated into high and romantic feeling, make a noble contrast with the coarse and licentious Greek or Roman, whose passion turns only on the difficulty of purchasing his mistress's person, but who never conceives the slightest apprehension concerning the state of her affections.

That the crowd might have their loud laugh, a *gracioso* or clown, usually a servant of the hero, is in the Spanish Drama uniformly introduced to make sport. Like Kemp or Tarleton, famous in the clown's part before the time of Shakespeare, this personage was permitted to fill up his part with extemporary jesting, not only on the performers, but with the audience. This irregularity, with others, seems to have been borrowed by the English stage from that of Spain, and is the li-

cense which Hamlet condemns in his instructions to the players: "And let those that be your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though, in the meantime, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered;—that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it."

The bald simplicity of the ancient plot was, in like manner, contrasted to disadvantage with the intricacies, involutions, suspense, and bustle of Spanish intrigue upon the stage. Hence the boast of one of their poets, thus translated by Lord Holland:

> "Invention, interest, sprightly turns in plays,
> Say what they will, are Spain's peculiar praise;
> Hers are the plots which strict attention seize,
> Full of intrigue, and yet disclosed with ease.
> Hence acts and scenes her fertile stage affords,
> Unknown, unrivall'd, on the foreign boards."
>
> *Life of Lope de Vega, p.* 106.

While we admire the richness of fancy displayed in the Spanish pieces, it is impossible, in an age of refinement, to avoid being shocked by their wilful and extravagant neglect of every thing which can add probability to the action of their Drama. But the apology for this license is well pleaded by Lord Holland.

"Without dwelling on the expulsion of the Chorus, (a most unnatural and inconvenient machine), the moderns, by admitting a complication of plot, have introduced a greater variety of incidents and character. The province of invention is enlarged; new passions, or at least new forms of the same passions, are brought within the scope of dramatic poetry. Fresh sources of interest are opened, and additional powers of imagination called into activity. Can we then deny what extends its jurisdiction, and enhances its interest, to be an improvement in an art whose professed object is to stir the passions by the imitation of human actions? In saying this, I do not mean to justify the breach of decorum, the neglect of probability, the anachronisms and other extravagancies of the founders of the modern theatre.

Because the first disciples of the school were not models of perfection, it does not follow that the fundamental maxims were defective. The rudeness of their workmanship is no proof of the inferiority of the material; nor does the want of skill deprive them of the merit of having discovered the mine. The faults objected to them form no necessary part of the system they introduced. Their followers in every country have either completely corrected or gradually reformed such abuses. Those who bow not implicitly to the authority of Aristotle, yet avoid such violent outrages as are common in our early plays. And those who pique themselves on the strict observance of his laws, betray, in the conduct, the sentiments, the characters, and the dialogue of their pieces (especially of their comedies), more resemblance to the modern than the ancient theatre; their code may be Grecian, but their manners, in spite of themselves, are Spanish, English, or French. They may renounce their pedigree, and even change their dress, but they cannot divest their features of a certain family-likeness to their poetical progenitors."

In France the irregularities of the revived Drama were of a lower complexion; for, until her stage was refined by Corneille, and brought under its present strict *régime*, it was adorned by but little talent; a circumstance which, amongst others, may account for the ease with which she subjected herself to critical rules, and assumed the yoke of Aristotle. Until she submitted to the Grecian forms and restrictions, there is but little interesting in the history of her stage.

England adopted the historical and romantic Drama with ardour, and in a state scarce more limited by rules than that of Spain herself. Her writers seem early to have ransacked Spanish literature; for the union of the countries during the short reign of Mary, nay even their wars under Elizabeth and Philip, made them acquainted with each other. The Spaniards had the start in the revival of the Drama. *Ferrex and Perrex*, our earliest tragedy, was first presented in 1561; and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, our first comedy, in 1575; whereas Lopez de Vega (who was not by any means the earliest

Spanish dramatist) died in 1562, leaving his stage stocked with his innumerable productions, to which his contemporaries had not failed to add their share. Thus, so soon as the stage of Britain was so far advanced as to be in a capacity of borrowing, that of Spain offered a fund to which her authors could have recourse; and, in fact, the Spanish Drama continued to be a mine in which the British poets collected materials, often without acknowledgment, during all the earlier part of her dramatic history. From this source, as well as from the partialities of the audience, arose that earlier attempt at show and spectacle, at combats and marvellous incidents, which, though with very poor means of representation, our early dramatic poets loved to produce at the Bull or the Fortune playhouses. The extravagance of their plots, and the poor efforts by which they endeavoured to represent show and procession, did not escape the censure of Sir Philip Sidney, who, leaning to the critical reformation which was already taking place in Italy, would gladly have seen our stage reduced to a more classical model.

"It is faultie," says that gallant knight, "both in place and time, the two necessarie companions of all corporall actions. For the stage should alway present but one place; and the uttermost time presupposed in it should bee both by *Aristotle's* precept, and common reason, but one day; there are both many dayes and many places inartificially imagined. But if it be so in *Gorboduke*, how much more in all the rest? where you shall have *Asia* of the one side, and *Affricke* of the other, and so many other under kingdomes, that the plaiir when he comes in, must ever begin with telling where hee is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now shall you have three ladies walke to gather flowers, and then wee must beleeve the stage to bee a garden. By and by wee heare newes of shipwracke in the same place, then wee are to blame if we accept it not for a rocke. Upon the backe of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave; while, in the meantime, two armies flie in, represented with some

five or six swordes and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field? Now of time they are much more liberall; for ordinarie it is, that two young princes fall in love. After many traverses shee is got with childe, delivered of a faire boy; he is lost, groweth a man, falleth in love, and is readie to get another childe, and all this in two houres space; which how absurd it is in sense, even sense may imagine, and art hath taught, and all ancient examples justified, and at this day the ordinary players in *Italy* will not err in."

Italy, referred to by Sir Philip Sidney, as the cradle of the reformed Drama, had had her own age of liberty and confusion; her mysteries, her moralities, her historical, and her romantic Dramas. But the taste for the ancient and classical stage was still rooted in the country where it had flourished, and Trissino is acknowledged as the father of the regular Drama. The *Sophonisba* of this learned prelate is praised by Voltaire as the first regular tragedy which Europe had seen after so many ages of barbarism. Pope has added his tribute.

> When learning, after the long Gothic night,
> Fair o'er the western world renew'd its light,
> With arts arising, Sophonisba rose,
> The tragic muse returning wept her woes;
> With her the Italian scene first learn'd to glow,
> And the first tears for her were taught to flow.

This tragedy was represented at Rome in the year 1515. The Greek model is severely observed, and the author has encumbered his scene with a Chorus. It has some poetic beauties, and is well calculated to recommend the new or rather revived system on which it was written. *La Rosmonda* of Rucellerì was written about the same time with *Sophonisba;* and, after these pieces, tragi-comedies, histories, and romantic Dramas, were discarded, and succeeded by tragedies upon a regular classical model; written in verse, having five acts, and generally a Chorus.

Notwithstanding their rigorous attention to the ancient model, the modern tragic poets of Italy have not been very successful in arresting the attention of their

countrymen. They are praised rather than followed; and the stern and unbending composition of Alfieri, while it has given a tone of rude and stoical dignity to his Dramas, has failed in rendering them attractive. They frequently please in the closet; but the audience of modern days requires to be kept awake by something more active, more bustling, more deeply interesting, than the lessons of the schools; and a poet of high fancy has written in some measure in vain, because he has mistaken the spirit of his age. The tragic actors also, whatever excellence they may attain to in their art, do not attract the same consideration, attention, and respect, as in France or England; and they who are the direct authors of a pleasure so nearly connected with our noblest and best feelings, occupy a rank subordinate to the performers at the opera.

It is only as a modification of the Drama, that we here propose to touch upon that entertainment of Italian growth, but known by importation in every civilized kingdom of Europe. These kingdoms have often rivalled each other in the rewards held forth to musical performers, and encouraged their merit by a degree of profusion, which has had the effect of rendering the professors petulant, capricious, and unmanageable. Their high emoluments are not granted, or their caprices submitted to, without a degree of pleasure in some degree corresponding to the expense and the sufferance; and it is in vain for the admirers of the legitimate Drama to pretend that such is not obtained. Voltaire has with more justice confessed, that probably the best imitation of the ancient stage was to be found in the Italian tragic opera. The recitative resembled the musical declamation of the Athenians, and the choruses, which are frequently introduced, when properly combined with the subject, approach to those of the Greeks, as forming a contrast, by the airs which they execute, to the recitative, or modulated dialogue of the scene. Voltaire instances the tragic operas of Metastasio in particular, as approaching in beauty of diction, and truth of sentiment, near to the ancient simplicity; and finds an apology even for the detached airs, (so fatal to

probability,) in the beauty of the poetry and the perfection of the music. And although, as a critic and man of cultivated taste, this author prefers the regular, noble, and severe beauties of the classic stage, to the effeminate and meretricious charms of the opera, still he concludes, that, with all its defects, the sort of enchantment which results from the brilliant intermixture of scenery, chorus, dancing, music, dress, and decoration, subjects even the genius of criticism; and that the most sublime tragedy, and most artful comedy, will not be so frequently revisited by the same individual as an indifferent opera. We may add the experience of London to the testimony of this great critic; and, indeed, were it possible that actors could frequently be procured, possessed of the powers of action and of voice, which were united in Grassini, it would be impossible to deny to the opera the praise of being an amusement as exquisite in point of taste, as fascinating from show and music. But as the musical parts of the entertainment are predominant, every thing else has been too often sacrificed to the caprice of a composer, wholly ignorant in every art save his own; and the mean and paltry dialogue, which is used as a vehicle for the music, is become proverbial to express nonsense and inanity.

The Italian comedy, as well as their tragedy, boasts its regular descent from classical times. Like the comedy of Menander, it introduces *dramatis personæ*, whose characters are never varied, and some of whom are supposed to be directly descended from the ancient *Mimi* of the *Atellanian* fables. Such an origin is claimed for the celebrated Harlequin, and for the no less renowned Puncinello, our English Punch, both of whom retain the character of jesters, cowards, wags, and buffoons, proper to the *Sannio* of the Romans. It is believed of these worthies, that they existed before the time of Plautus, and continued to play their frolics during the middle ages, when the legitimate Drama was unknown. For the former fact, sculpture, as well as tradition, is appealed to by Italian antiquaries, who have discovered the representation of these grotesque char-

acters upon the Etruscan vases. In support of the latter averment, the grave authority of Saint Thomas Aquinas is appealed to, who, we rejoice to find, thought Harlequin and Punch no unlawful company in fitting time and place.* "*Ludus*," says that eminent person, with more consideration for human infirmity than some saints of our own day, "*est necessarius ad conversationem vitæ humanæ: ad omnia autem quæ sunt utilia conversationi humanæ deputari possunt aliqua officia licita: et ideò etiam officium histrionum quod ordinatur ad solatium hominibus exhibendum, non est secundum se illicitum, nec sunt histriones in statu peccati, dummodo moderatè ludo utantur; id est, non utendo aliquibus illicitis verbis vel factis, ad ludum, et non adhibendo ludum negotiis et temporibus indebitis, unde illi qui moderate eis subveniunt, non peccant, sed juste faciunt mercedem ministerii eorum eis tribuendo. Et licet D. August.* super. Joan. *dicit quod donare res suas histrionibus vitium est immane, hoc intelligi debet de illis qui dant histrionibus qui in ludo utuntur illicitis, vel de illis qui superflue sua in tales consumunt, non de illis histrionibus qui moderate ludo utuntur.*"

Saint Anthony gives his sanction to Saint Thomas on this point: "*Histrionalis ars, quia deservit humanæ recreationi quæ necessaria est vitæ hominis secundum D. Thomam, de se non est illicita, et de illa arte vivere non est prohibitum.*"† (S. Antonius in 3 part. *suæ Summæ*, tit.

* "Sport is necessary to the usual intercourse of human life; and, whatever things are so necessary, have their lawful uses, and therefore, the occupation of stage-players intended for the solacement of mankind, is not in itself unlawful, nor are the actors in a state of sin, providing that they use their sport with moderation; that is, not using any unlawful words or actions in their diversion, and not producing their sport in unlawful times and circumstances. Hence, it follows that those who support them do not commit sin, but act honestly in paying them the reward of their service. And, although Saint Augustus hath said, in his Commentary on Saint John, that it is a great sin to give one's effects to stage-players, yet I understand it to be said exclusively of those who bestow their bounty on such actors as use unlawful expressions or actions in exercising their art, or of such as wantonly waste their substance on such expenditure; but not to be spoken of moderate rewards given to actors who exercise their art with propriety."

† The art of stage-playing, according to Saint Thomas, is not in itself unlawful, nor is it forbidden to live thereby, seeing that it tends to human recreation, which is necessary to human life.

iii, cap. 4.) Saint Anthony, indeed, adds the reasonable restriction, that no clergyman should play Harlequin, and that Punch should not exhibit in the church.

Under this venerable authority these Mimi went on and flourished. Other characters enlarged their little Drama. The personages appeared in masks. "Each of these," says Mr. Walker, "was originally intended as a kind of characteristic representation of some particular Italian district or town. Thus *Pantalone* was a Venetian merchant; *Dottore*, a Bolognese physician; *Spaviento*, a Neapolitan braggadocio; *Pullicinella*, a wag of Apulia; *Giangurgolo* and *Coviello*, two clowns of Calabria; *Gelsomino*, a Roman beau; *Beltrame*, a Milanese simpleton; *Brighella*, a Ferarese pimp; and *Arlecchino*, a blundering servant of Bergamo. Each of these personages was clad in a peculiar dress; each had his peculiar mask; and each spoke the dialect of the place he represented. Besides these, and a few other such personages, of which at least four were introduced in each play, there were the *Amorosos* or *Innamoratos*; that is, some men and women who acted serious parts, with Smeraldina, Colombina, Spilletta, and other females, who played the parts of servettas or waiting-maids. All these spoke Tuscan or Roman, and wore no masks." (*Essay on the Revival of the Drama in Italy*, p. 249.)

The pieces acted by this class of actors were called *Commedia dell' arte*, and were congenial to the taste of the Italians, with whom gesticulation and buffoonery are natural attributes. Their Drama was of the most simple kind. Each of the actors was already possessed of his dramatic character, which was as inalienable as his dress, was master of the dialect he was to use, and had his imagination and memory stored with all the characteristic jests, or *lazzi* as they were termed, peculiar to the personage he represented. All that the author had to do was to invent the skeleton of a plot, which should bring his characters into dramatic situation with respect to each other. The dialogue suited to the occasion was invented by the players, just as ours invest their parts with the proper gestures and actions. This skeleton had the name of *scenario*, and the precise

action as well as the dialogue was filled up by the performers, either impromptu, or in consequence of previous arrangement and premeditation. This species of comedy was extremely popular, especially among the lower class of spectators. It was often adopted as an amusement in good society, and by men of genius; and Flamineo de la Scala has left about fifty such *scenarios* adapted for representation. The fashion even found its way into England, and probably the part of Master Punch, who first appeared in the character of the *Vice* of the English morality, was trusted to the improvisatory talents of the actor. Mr. D'Israeli, a curious as well as elegant investigator of ancient literature, has shown, that at least one scheme of a *Commedia dell' arte* has been preserved to us. It is published in the *Variorum* edition of Shakspeare, but remains unexplained by the commentators. Such comedies, it is evident, could require no higher merit in the composer than the imagining and sketching a few comic situations; the dialogue and diction was all intrusted to the players.

The Italians, however, became early possessed of a regular comedy, which engrossed the admiration of the more cultivated classes of society. Bibbiena's comedy, entitled *La Calandra*, is composed in imitation of the Dramas of Terence and Plautus. It was first acted in 1490. *La Calandra* is remarkable not only for being the first Italian comedy, but also for the perfection of scenic decoration with which it was accompanied in the representation. It was followed by the productions of Ariosto and Trissino, and other authors in the same line. But it appears from the efforts used to support this style of Drama, that it did not take kindly root in the soil, and lacked that popularity which alone can nurse it freely. Various societies were formed under the whimsical titles of *Gli Intronati*, *Gli Insensati*, and so forth, for the express purpose of bringing forward the regular Drama; exertions which would certainly have been unnecessary, had the legitimate stage received that support and encouragement which arises from general popularity.

Goldoni, in a later age, at once indulged his own

fanciful genius and his natural indolence, by renouncing the classical rules, and endeavouring to throw into the old and native Italian *Mascherata* the variety and attributes of the proper comedy. He adopted Harlequin and the rest of his merry troop in the characters which they held, and endeavoured to enlist them in the more regular service of the Drama; just as free corps and partizans are sometimes new-modelled into battalions of the line. This ingenious and lively writer retained all the license of the *Commedia dell' arte*, and all the immunities which it claimed from regular and classical rules; but instead of trusting to the extempore jests and grotesque wit of the persons whom he introduced, he engaged them in dialogues, as well as plots, of his own invention, which often display much humour and even pathos. It required, however, the richness of a fancy like Goldoni's to extract novelty and interest from a dramatic system in which so many of the actors held a fixed and prescriptive character, hardly admitting of being varied. Accordingly, we do not find that the Italian stage is at present in a more flourishing condition than that of other modern nations.

The revival of the regular Drama in France was attended with important consequences, owing to the nature of her government, the general use of her language throughout Europe, and the influence which, from her situation, she must necessarily hold over other nations. It is the boast of Paris that the regular classical Drama, banished from every other stage, found a safe and honourable refuge on her own. Yet France has reluctantly confessed that she also had her hour of barbarism. Her earlier Drama was borrowed, like that of other countries, from Spain, who, during the whole of the sixteenth and great part of the seventeenth century, held such a formidable predominance in the European republic. While the classical stage was reviving in Italy, and the historical and romantic Drama was flourishing in Spain, France was torn to pieces by civil discord. The first French tragedy composed upon a regular plan was that of *Mairet*, imitated from the

Sophonisba of Trissino; and Riccoboni boasts with justice, that whoever shall compare the Italian tragedy of the sixteenth century with that of the French of the same period, will find the latter extravagant and irregular, and the former already possessed of gravity, dignity, and regularity. The French, like the English, date the excellence of their stage from one great author; and the illustrious name of Pierre Corneille affords to their dramatic history the mighty landmark which Shakspeare gives to our own.

Cardinal Richelieu, who had succeeded in establishing upon a broad basis the absolute power of the French monarch, was not insensible to the graces and ornaments which the throne derived from being surrounded by the Muses. He was himself fond of poetry, and even a competitor for the honours of the buskin. He placed himself at the head of five dramatic writers, to whom, on that account, the public gave the title of *Les Cinq Auteurs*. All these are deservedly forgotten excepting Corneille, of whose successful talent the Cardinal had the meanness to evince no ordinary degree of jealousy. The malevolence of that minister was carried so far, that he employed the French Academy, whose complaisance must be recorded to their shame, to criticise severely the *Cid*, the first, and perhaps the finest of Corneille's tragedies. Scuderie, a favourite of the Cardinal, buoyed by Richelieu's favour, was able for some time to balance Corneille in the opinion of the public; but his name is now scarcely known by any other circumstance than his impudent and audacious rivalry. This great man was not only surrounded by the worst possible models, but unfortunately the authors of these models were also favourites of the public, and of the all-powerful Cardinal; yet Corneille vanquished the taste of his age, the competition of his rivals, and the envy of Richelieu.

Corneille, like his predecessors, and like Routrou in particular, borrowed liberally from the Spanish theatre; but his own taste, regulated probably upon his situation, dictated an adherence to the classical model. The French stage arose, it must be remembered, under

the protection of an absolute monarch, for whose amusement the poet laboured, and in whose presence the Drama was performed. It followed as a natural consequence, that a more strict etiquette was exacted upon the scene than had hitherto been supposed applicable to a merely popular amusement. A departure from regularity in tragedy was no longer a bold flight. A violation of decorum in comedy was no longer a broad jest. When the audience was dignified by the presence of the monarch, the former became an impertinence, and the latter a gross and indecent insult. The muse of comedy was therefore bound over for her good behaviour; and even her grave sister was laid under such rules and restrictions as should ensure the decorum and dignity of her scene.

It was at this period that those classical fetters which are framed on the three unities were fashioned into form, and imposed on the French Drama. These are acknowledged by Corneille, in his *Essay upon Dramatic Poetry*, in the following short but emphatic sentence:—"*Il faut observer les unités d'action, de lieu, et de jour: personne n'en doute.*" The rule, as thus emphatically admitted by the fiery Corneille, was equally binding upon the elegant Racine, and has fettered the French stage until the present day. "La Motte," says Voltaire, "a man of wit and talent, but attached to paradoxes, has written in our time against the doctrine of the Unities, but that literary heresy had no success."

Upon these rules, adopted by the very first writer of eminence for the French stage, and subscribed to by all succeeding dramatists, depends the principal and long-disputed difference betwixt the Drama of France and those countries in which her laws of taste have been received; and the stages of Spain, England, and modern Germany, where those critical maxims have been controverted. In other words, the Unities proper to the Classical Drama have been found inapplicable to plays of a historical or romantic plan. It is, therefore, necessary to examine with accuracy the essence and effect of those laws so often disputed with more obstinacy than liberality.

The arbitrary forms to which the French thus subjected their theatre are, in their general purport, founded on good and sound rules of the critical art. But, considered judaically and literally, the interpretation put upon those unities by the French critics must necessarily lay the dramatic author under restraints equally severe and unnecessary, without affording any corresponding addition to the value of his work. The pedantry by which they are enforced, reminds one of the extreme, minute, rigorous, and punctilious discipline, to which some regiments have been subjected by a pedantic commanding officer, which seldom fails to lower the spirit, and destroy the temper of the soldier, without being of the slightest service to him in the moment of danger or the day of battle.

The first dramatic unity is that of Action; and, rightly understood, it is by far the most important. A whole, says Aristotle, is that which has a beginning, middle, and end. In short, one strong concentrated interest, upon which all subordinate incidents depend, and to which they contribute, must pervade the piece. It must open with the commencement of the play, evolve itself, and be progressive with its progress,—must be perpetually in sight and ever stationary, until at length it arrives at a catastrophe, by which it is ended and extinguished. In this rule, abstractedly considered, there is nothing but what is consistent with good sense and sound criticism. The period allowed for dramatic representation is not long, and will not admit of the episodical ornaments which may be happily introduced into epic poetry. And as the restlessness or impatience of a theatrical audience is always one of its marked characteristics, it has been observed, that neither the most animated description, nor the most beautiful poetry, can ever reconcile the spectators to those inartificial scenes in which the plot or action of the piece stands still, that the performers may say fine things. The introduction of an interest, separate and distinct from the main action of the play, has a still worse effect; it diminishes the effect of the whole, and divides the attention of the audience; as a pack of hounds, when in full pursuit,

are impeded and puzzled by starting a fresh object of chase.

Yet even this rule must be liberally considered, if we would allow dramatic authors that fair room and exercise for their talents, which gives rise to the noblest display of genius in the art. Modern dramatists are no longer, it must be remembered, limited to the simple and severe uniformity of the ancient Drama, which fixed on one single event as its object,—made it the subject of the moral reflections of the Chorus,—managed it by the intervention of three, or at most five persons, and consequently presented a picture so limited in size and subject, that there was no difficulty in avoiding the intermixture of a foreign interest. The modern taste has opened the stage to a wider range of topics, which are, at the same time, more complicated in detail, depending on the agency of a variety of performers, and on the result of a succession of events. Such Dramas have indeed a unity of action peculiar to themselves, which should predominate over and absorb every other. But although, like the oak, it should uplift itself over all the neighbouring underwood, its dignity is not injured by the presence and vicinity of that which it overshadows. On the contrary, a succession of events tending to the same end, if they do not divert the attention from the principal interest, cannot fail, by their variety and succession, to keep it fixed upon the business of the scene.

To take an example. In the tragedy of Macbeth, a chain of varied and important events is introduced, any one link of which might be hammered out into a Drama, on the severe and simple model of the Drama of ancient Greece. There is the murder of Duncan,—that of Banquo,—and the dethronement and death of the tyrant; all which are events complete of themselves, independent of each other, and yet included within one tragedy of five acts. But, nevertheless, this is never felt as a deficiency in the performance. It is to the character of Macbeth, to his ambition, guilt, remorse, and final punishment, that the mind attaches itself during the whole play; and thus the succession of various incidents, unconnected excepting by the relation they bear

to the principal personage, far from distracting the attention of the audience, continues to sharpen and irritate curiosity till the curtain drops over the fallen tyrant. This is not, indeed, a unity of action according to the rule of Aristotle, or the observance of the French theatre; but, in a higher point of view, it has all the advantage which could possibly be derived from the severest adherence to the precept of Aristotle, with this additional merit, that the interest never stagnates in declamation, or is suspended by unnecessary dialogue.

It would in fact be easy to show, that the unity of action, in its strict sense, may frequently be an unnatural as well as a cumbrous restraint on the genius of the poet. In the course of nature, an insulated action seldom exists, of a nature proper to transfer to the stage. If, indeed, the play is founded on some single mythological fable, or if the scene is laid in some early stage of society, when man as yet remained separated from his kind, and connected only with his petty tribe or family, the subject of a plot may be chosen where the agency of a very few persons, and these naturally connected together, may, without foreign or extraneous assistance, afford matter for a tragedy. But, in the actual course of the peopled world, men are so crowded together, and their movements depend so much upon impulses foreign to themselves, that the action must often appear multiplied and complicated, and all that the author can do is, to preserve the interest uniform and undivided. Its progress may be likened to that of a brook through beautiful scenery. A judicious improver of the landscape would be certainly desirous to make its course visible, but not to cut off its beautiful undulations, or to compel it into a straight channel. He would follow the course of nature, and neither affect to conceal the smaller rills by which the stream was fed, nor bring them so much in view as to deprive the principal object of its consequence. We admit the difficulty inseparable from the dramatic art, and must grant, that the author runs some risk of losing sight of the main interest of the piece, by dwelling upon the subordinate accessories; but we contend, that the atten-

tion of the audience is still more likely to be fatigued by a bald and simple plot, to which, during the course of five acts, there must belong much speaking and little progress. And, in point of common sense and common feeling, that piece must always present unity of action which has unity of interest and feeling; which fixes the mind of the audience upon one train of thought and passion, to which every occurrence in the Drama verges; and which is consummated and wound up by the final catastrophe.

The second dramatic unity is that of Time, about which the critics of various nations have disagreed. If taken in its strict and proper sense, it means that the time occupied by the representation, should not exceed that supposed to be consumed in the action represented. But even Aristotle extends the duration of the action to one revolution of the sun, and Corneille extends it to thirty hours, which is, to the actual period of representation, as ten to one. Boileau, a supereminent authority, thus lays down the rule for the unities of time and place:—

> Que le lieu de la scene y soit fixé et marqué.
> Un Rimeur, sans peril, delà les Pirenées,
> Sur la scene en un jour renferme des années.
> Là souvent le Heros d'un spectacle grossier,
> Enfant au premier acte, est barbon au dernier,
> Mais nous, que la Raison à ses règles engage,
> Nous voulons qu'avec art l'action se ménage:
> Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un seul fait accompli
> Tienne jusqu'à la fin le Théâtre rempli.

It has been triumphantly remarked, that in thus yielding up the strict letter of the precept—in allowing the three hours employed in acting a play to be multiplied into twenty-four or thirty—the critics have retained a great proportion of the inconvenience of this famous rule, while they sacrificed its principle, and any advantage attached to its observance. The only benefit supposed to be attached to this unity is that of probability. We shall not at present enquire whether this is worth preserving, at the cost of imposing heavy restrictions on dramatic genius. But granting the affirm-

ative, probability is as much violated by compressing the events of twenty-four hours into a period of only three, as if the author had exercised the still greater license of the English and Spanish theatres. There is no charm in the revolution of the sun, which circumscribes within that particular period the events of a Drama. When the magic circle drawn around the author by the actual date of representation is once obliterated, the argument grounded upon probability falls; and he may extend his narrative unconfined by any rule, except what may be considered as resolving itself into the unity of action. A week, a month, a year, years—may be included in the course of the Drama, provided always the poet has power so to rivet the attention of the audience on the passing scene, that the lapse of time shall pass unregarded. There must be none of those marked pauses which force upon the spectator's attention the breach of this unity. Still less ought the judicious dramatist to permit his piece to embrace such a space of time, as shall necessarily produce the change on the persons of the characters ridiculed by Boileau. The extravagant conduct of the plot in the *Winter's Tale* has gone far to depreciate that Drama, which, in passages of detached beauty, is inferior to none of Shakspeare's, in the opinion of the best judges. It might perhaps be improved in acting, by performing the three first acts as a play, and the fourth and fifth as an afterpiece. Yet, even as it is now acted, who is it that, notwithstanding the cold objection arising out of the breach of unity, witnesses, without delight, the exquisite contrast betwixt the court and the hamlet, the fascinating and simple elegance of Perdita, or the witty rogueries of Autolycus? The poet is too powerful for the critic, and we lose the exercise of our judgment in the warmth of our admiration.

The faults of Shakspeare, or of his age, we do not, however, recommend to the modern dramatist, whose modesty will certainly place him in his own estimation far beneath that powerful magician, whose art could fascinate us even by means of deformity itself. But if, for his own sake, the author ought to avoid such gross

violations of dramatic rule, the public, for theirs, ought not to tie him down to such severe limitations as must cramp, at least, if they do not destroy, his power of affording them pleasure. If the whole five acts are to be compressed within the space of twenty-four hours, the events must, in the general case, be either so much crowded upon each other as to defeat the very probability which it is the purpose of this law to preserve; or, many of them, being supposed to have happened before the commencement of the piece, must be detailed in narrative, which never fails to have a bad effect on the stage.

The same objections apply to the rigid enforcement of the third unity, that of Place; and, indeed, the French authors have used respecting it the license of relaxing, in practice, the severity of their theory. They have frequently infringed the rule which they affirm to be inviolable; and their flexible creed permits the place to be changed, provided the audience are not transported out of the city where the scene is laid. This mitigation of doctrine, like that granted in the unity of time, is a virtual resignation of the principle contended for. Let us examine, however, upon what that principle is founded.

The rule, which prohibits the shifting the scene during the period of performance, was borrowed by the French from the ancients, without considering the peculiar circumstances in which it arose. First, We have seen already that, during the ancient Drama, there was no division into acts, and that the action was only suspended during the songs of the Chorus, who themselves represented a certain class of personages connected with the scene. The stage, therefore, was always filled; and a supposed change of place would have implied the violent improbability, that the whole Chorus were transported, while in the sight of the spectators, and employed in the discharge of their parts, to the new scene of action. Secondly, There is evidence that in the *Eumenides* of Æschylus, and the *Ajax* of Sophocles, the scene is actually changed, in defiance of the presence of the Chorus; and a much greater violation of proba-

bility is incurred than could have taken place in a modern theatre, where, before every change of scene, the stage is emptied of the performers. Thirdly, The ancients were less hardly pressed by this rule than the modern writers. From the dimensions of their theatres, and the size of their stages, the place of action was considerably larger, and might be held to include a wider extent than ours. The climate of Greece admitted of many things being transacted with propriety in the open air; and, finally, they had a contrivance for displaying the interior of a house or temple to the audience, which, if not an actual change of scene, was adapted to the same purpose.

If this long litigated question, therefore, is to be disposed of by precedent, we have shown that the rule of the ancients was neither absolute, nor did the circumstances of their stage correspond with those of ours; to which it may be added, that the simple and inartificial structure of their plots seldom required a change of scene. But, surely, it is of less consequence merely to ascertain what was the practice of the ancients, than to consider how far such practice is founded upon truth, good taste, and general effect. Granting, therefore, that the supposed illusion, which transports the spectator to the actual scene of action, really exists, let us enquire whether, in sacrificing the privilege of an occasional change of scene, we do not run the risk of shocking the spectator, and disturbing his delightful dreams, by other absurdities and improbabilities, attendant necessarily on a scrupulous adherence to this restriction.

If the action is always to pass in the scene, some place of general resort must be adopted, a hall, anteroom, or the like. It can seldom be so fortunately selected but that much must be necessarily discussed there, which, in order to preserve any appearance of probability, should be transacted elsewhere; that many persons must be introduced, whose presence in that particular place must appear unnatural; and that much must be done there, which the very circumstances of the piece render totally absurd. Dennis has applied these observations with great force, and at the same

time with great bitterness, in his critique upon *Cato*, which Johnson has quoted at length in his *Life of Addison*. The scene, it must be remembered, is laid, during the whole Drama, with scrupulous attention to the classical rule, in the great hall of Cato's palace at Utica. Here the conspirators lay their plots, the lovers carry on their intrigues; and yet Sempronius, with great inconsistency, disguises himself as Juba, to obtain entrance into this vestibule, which was common to all. Here Cato retires to moralize, and chides his son for interrupting him, and, although he goes out to stab himself, it is to this place that he is brought back to die. All this affords a striking proof how genius and taste can be fettered and embarrassed by a too pedantic observance of rules. Let no one suppose that the inconveniences arising from the rigid observance of the unity of place, occur in the tragedy of *Cato* alone; they might, in that case, be attributed to the inexperience or want of skill in the author. The tragedies of Corneille and Racine afford examples enough that the authors found themselves compelled to violate the rules of probability and common sense, in order to adhere to those of Aristotle. In the tragedy of *Cinna*, for example, the scene is laid in the Emperor's cabinet; and, in that very cabinet, compelled, doubtless, by the laws of unity, Amelia shouts forth aloud her resolution to assassinate the Emperor. It is there, too, that Maximus and Cinna confide to each other all the secrets of their conspiracy; and it is there, where, to render the impropriety more glaring, Cinna suddenly reflects upon the rashness of his own conduct:—

> Amis, dans ce palais on peut nous écouter;
> Et nous parlons peut-être avec trop d'imprudence,
> Dans un lieu si mal propre à notre confidence.

It would be an invidious, but no difficult task, to show that several of the *chefs-d'œuvres* of the French Drama are liable to similar objections; and that the awkward dilemmas in which the unity of place involves them, are far more likely to destroy the illusion of the performance, than the mere change of scene would have done.

But we refer the reader to the *Dramaturgie* of Lessing upon this curious topic.

The main question yet remains behind, namely, whether such an illusion is actually produced in the minds of the audience by the best acted play, as induces them to suppose themselves witnessing a reality;—an illusion, in short, so complete, as to suffer interruption from the occasional extension of time, or change of place, in the course of the piece? We do not hesitate to say, that no such impression was ever produced on a sane understanding; and that the Parisian critic, in whose presence the unities are never violated, no more mistakes Talma for Nero, than a London citizen identifies Kemble with Coriolanus, or Kean with Richard III. The ancients, from the distance of the stage, and their mode of dressing and disguising their characters, might certainly approach a step nearer to reality; and, producing on their stage the very images of the deities they worshipped, speaking the language which they accounted proper to them, it is probable that, to minds capable of high excitation, there might be a shade of this illusion in their representations. The solemn distance of the stage, the continuous and uninterrupted action, kept the attention of the Greeks at once more closely rivetted, and more abstracted from surrounding circumstances. But, in the modern theatre, the rapid succession of intervals for reflection; the well-known features of the actors; the language which they speak, differing frequently from that which belongs to the age and country where the scene is laid—interrupt, at every turn, every approximation to the fantastic vision of reality into which those writers who insist upon the strict observance of the unities, suppose the audience to be lulled. To use the nervous words of Johnson, "It is false, that any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramatic fable in its materiality was ever credible, or, for a single moment, was ever credited." There is a conventional treaty between the author and the audience, that, upon certain suppositions being granted by the latter, his powers of imagination shall be exerted for the amusement of the spectators. The postulates which

are demanded, even upon the French theatre, and under the strictest model, are of no ordinary magnitude. Although the stage is lighted with lamps, the spectator must say with the subjugated Catherine,

"I grant it is the sun that shines so bright."

The painted canvass must pass for a landscape; the well-known faces of the performers for those of ancient Greeks, or Romans, or Saracens, and the present time for many ages distant. He that submits to such a convention ought not scrupulously to limit his own enjoyment. That which is supposed Rome in one act, may, in the next, be fancied Paris; and as for time, it is, to use the words of Dr. Johnson, "of all modes of existence, most obsequious to imagination; a lapse of years is as easily conceived as a passage of hours. In contemplation we easily contract the time of real actions, and, therefore, willingly permit it to be contracted when we only see their imitation."

If dramatic representation does not produce the impression of reality, in what, it may be asked, consists its power? We reply, that its effects are produced by the powerful emotions which it excites in the minds of the spectators. The professors of every fine art operate their impressions in the same manner, though they address themselves to different organs. The painter exhibits his scene to the eye; the orator pours his thunder upon the ear; the poet awakens the imagination of his reader by written description; but each has the same motive, the hope, namely, of exciting in the reader, hearer, or spectator, a tone of feeling similar to that which existed in his own bosom, ere it was bodied forth by his pencil, tongue, or pen. It is the artist's object, in short, to tune the reader's imagination to the same pitch with his own; and to communicate, as well as colours and words can do, the same sublime sensations which had dictated his own compositions. The tragedian attempts to attain this object still more forcibly, because his art combines those of the poet, orator, and artist, by storming, as it were, the imagination at once through the eye

and the ear. Undoubtedly, a Drama with such advantages, and with those of dresses and costume, approaches more nearly to actual reality; and, therefore, has a better chance of attaining its object, especially when addressing the sluggish and inert fancies of the multitude; although it may remain a doubtful question, whether, with all these means and appliances, minds of a high poetic temperature may not receive a more lively impression from the solitary perusal, than from the representation, of one of Shakspeare's plays. But, to the most ignorant spectator, however unaccustomed to the trick of the scene, the excitement which his fancy receives, falls materially short of actual mental delusion. Even the sapient Partridge himself never thought of being startled at the apparition of the King of Denmark, which he knew to be only a man in a strange dress; it was the terror so admirably expressed by Garrick, which communicated itself to his feelings, and made him reverse the case of the fiends, and tremble without believing. In truth, the effects produced upon this imaginary character, as described by an excellent judge of human nature, exhibit, probably, the highest point of illusion to which theatrical exhibition can conduct a rational being. In an agony of terror which made his knees knock against each other, he never forgets that he is only witnessing a play. The presence of Mrs. Millar and his master assures him against the reality of the apparition, yet he is no more able to subdue his terrors by this comfortable reflection, than we have been to check our tears, although well aware that the Belvidera, with whose sorrows we sympathised, was no other than our own inimitable Mrs. Siddons. With all our passions and all our sympathies, we are still conscious of the ideal character of that which excites them; and it is probably this very consciousness of the unreality of the scene, that refines our sorrows into a melancholy, yet delicious emotion, and extracts from it that bitterness necessarily connected with a display of similar misery in actual life.

If, therefore, no allusion subsists of a character to be affected by a change of scene, or by the prolongation of

the time beyond the rules of Aristotle, the very foundation of these unities is undermined; but, at the same time, every judicious author will use liberty with prudence.

If we are inclined to ascend to the origin of these celebrated rules, we ought not to be satisfied with the *ipse dixit* of a Grecian critic, who wrote so many centuries ago, and whose works have reference to a state of dramatic composition which has now no existence. Upon the revival of letters, indeed, the authority of Aristotle was considered as omnipotent; but even Boileau remonstrated against his authority when weighed with that of reason and common sense.

"Un pedant enivré de sa vaine science,
Tout hérissé de Grec, tout bouffi d'arrogance,
Et qui de mille auteurs retenus mot pour mot,
Dans la teste entassez, n'a souvent fait qu' un sot,
Croit qu' un livre fait tout, et que sans Aristote
La raison ne voit goutte, et la bon sens radote."

The opinions of Aristotle must be judged of according to the opportunities and authorities which lay open before him; and from the high critical judgment he has displayed, we can scarce err in supposing he would have drawn different results, in different circumstances. Dr. Drake, whose industry and taste have concentrated so much curious information respecting Shakspeare and his age, has quoted upon this topic a striking passage from Mr. Morgan's *Essay on the Character of Falstaff.*

Speaking, says Dr. Drake, of the magic influence which our poet almost invariably exerts over his auditors, Mr. Morgan remarks, that "on such an occasion, a fellow like *Rymer*,* waking from his trance, shall lift up his constable's staff, and charge this great magician, this daring *practiser of arts inhibited*, in the name of Aristotle to surrender; whilst Aristotle himself, disowning his wretched officer, would fall prostrate at his feet and acknowledge his supremacy.—O supreme of dramatic excellence! (might he say) not to me be imputed the insolence of fools. The bards of *Greece* were confined

* Rymer was a calumniator of Shakspeare.

within the narrow circle of the Chorus, and hence they found themselves constrained to practise, for the most part, the precision, and copy the details, of nature. I followed them, and knew not that a larger circle might be drawn, and the Drama extended to the whole reach of human genius. Convinced, I see that a more compendious *nature* may be obtained; a nature of *effects* only, to which neither the relation of place, or continuity of time, are always essential. Nature, condescending to the faculties and apprehensions of man, has drawn through human life a regular chain of visible causes and effects: But Poetry delights in surprise, conceals her steps, seizes at once upon the heart, and obtains the sublime of things without betraying the rounds of her ascent. True poetry is *magic* not *nature;* an effect from causes hidden or unknown. To the magician I prescribed no laws; his law and his power are one; his power is his law. If his end is obtained, who shall question his course? Means, whether apparent or hidden, are justified in poesy by success; but then most perfect and most admirable when most concealed.

"Yes, continues Mr. Morgan, whatever may be the neglect of some, or the censure of others, there are those who firmly believe, that this wild, this uncultivated *barbarian*, as he has been called, has not yet obtained one half of his fame; and who trust that some new Stagyrite will arise, who, instead of pecking at the surface of things, will enter into the inward soul of his compositions, and expel, by the force of congenial feelings, those foreign impurities which have stained and disgraced his page. And as to those *spots* which still remain, they may perhaps become invisible, to those who shall seek them through the medium of his beauties, instead of looking for those beauties, as is too frequently done, through the smoke of some real or imputed obscurity. When the hand of time shall have brushed off his present editors and commentators, and when the very name of Voltaire, and even the memory of the language in which he has written, shall be no more, the Apalachian mountains, the banks of the Ohio, and the plains of Sciola, shall resound with the accents of this

barbarian. In his native tongue he shall roll the genuine passions of nature; nor shall the griefs of *Lear* be alleviated, or the charms and wit of *Rosalind* be abated by *time.*"*

In adopting the views of those authors who have pleaded for the liberty of the poet, it is not our intention to deny, that great advantages may be obtained by the observance of the unities; not considering them as in themselves essential to the play; but only as points upon which the credibility and intelligibility of the action in some sort depend. We acknowledge, for example, that the author would be deficient in dramatic art, who should divide the interest of his piece into two or more separate plots, instead of combining it in one progressive action. We confess, moreover, that the writer, who more violently extends the time, or more frequently changes the place of representation, than can be justified by the necessity of the story, and vindicated by his exertion of dramatic force, acts unwisely, in so far as he is likely to embarrass a great part of the audience, who, from imperfect hearing or slowness of comprehension, may find it difficult to apprehend the plot of his play. The latitude which we are disposed to grant, is regulated by the circumstances of the case, the interest of the plot, and, above all, the talents of the author. He that despises the praise of regularity which is attainable by study, cannot reckon on the indulgence of the audience, unless on the condition of indemnifying them by force of genius. If a definitive rule were to be adopted, we should say, that it would certainly be judicious to place any change of place or extension of time at the beginning of a new act; as the falling of the curtain and cessation of the action have prepared the audience to set off, as it were, upon a new score. But we consider the whole of these points of propriety as secondary to the real purposes of the Drama, and not as limitary of that gifted genius, who can, in the whirlwind of his scene, bear the imagination of his audience along with him over the boundaries of place,

* *Shakspeare and his Times*, by Nathan Drake, M. D. p. 553, 554, vol. II.

"While panting Time toils after them in vain."

But it is not upon the observance of the unities alone that the French found their pretensions to a classical theatre. They boast also to have discarded that intermixture of tragic and comic scenes, which was anciently universal upon the Spanish and English stages.

If it had been only understood by this reformation, that the French condemned and renounced that species of tragi-comedy, which comprehended two distinct plots, the one of a serious, the other of a humorous character, and these two totally unconnected, we give them full credit for their restriction. Dryden, in the *Spanish Friar*, and other pieces; and Southern, both in *Oroonoko* and *Isabella*, as well as many other authors of their age, have in this particular transgressed unpardonably the unity of action. For, in the cases we have quoted, the combination of the two plots is so slight, that the serious and comic scenes, separated, might each furnish forth a separate Drama; so that the audience appear to be listening not to one play only, but to two dramatic actions independent of each other, although contained in the same piece. So far, therefore, we heartily agree in the rule which excludes such an unhappy interchange of inconsistent scenes, moving upon opposite principles and interests.

When, however, the French critics carry this rule further, and proscribe the appearance of comic or inferior characters, however intimately connected with the tragic plot, we would observe, in the first place, that they run the risk of diminishing the reality of the scene; and secondly, that they exclude a class of circumstances essential to its beauty.

On the first point, it must be observed, that the rule which imposes upon valets and subordinate personages the necessity of talking as harmonious verse and as elegant poetry as their masters, entirely ruins the probability of the action. Where all is elegant, nothing can be sublime; where all is ornamented, nothing can be impressive; where all is tuned to the same smooth

falsetto of sentiment, much or all may be ingenious, but nothing can be natural or real. By such an assimilation of manners and language, we stamp fiction on the very front of our dramatic representation. The touches of nature which Shakspeare has exhibited in his lower and gayer characters, like the chastened background of a landscape, increase the effect of the principal group. The light and fanciful humour of Mercutio, serves, for example, to enhance and illustrate the romantic and passionate character of Romeo. Even the doating fondness and silly peevishness of the Nurse tend to relieve the soft and affectionate character of Juliet, and to place her before the audience in a point of view, which those who have seen Miss O'Neil perform Juliet, in the fifth scene of the second act, know how to appreciate. A contrast is effected, which a French author dared not attempt: but of which every bosom at once acknowledges the power and the truth. Let us suppose, that the gay and gallant Mercutio had as little character as the walking confidant of a French hero, who echoes the hexameters of his friend in hexameters of a lower level; or let us suppose the nurse of Juliet to be a gentle Nora, as sublime in white linen as her principal in white satin; and let the reader judge whether the piece would gain in dignity or decorum, anything proportioned to what it must lose in truth and interest. The audience at once sympathises with the friendship of Romeo and Mercutio, rendered more natural and more interesting, by the very contrast of their characters; and each spectator feels as a passion, not as a matter of reflection, that desire of vengeance which impels Romeo against Tibalt; for we acknowledge as an amiable and interesting individual, the friend whom he has lost by the sword of the Capulet. Even the anilities of the Nurse give a reality to the piece, which, whatever French critics may pretend, is much more seriously disturbed by inconsistency of manners, than by breach of their dramatic unities. "God forbid," says Mr. Puff, in the *Critic*, "that, in a free country, all the fine words in the language should be engrossed by the higher characters of the piece."

The French critics did not carry their ideas of equality quite so far; but they tuned the notes of their subalterns just one pitch lower than those of their principal characters, so that their language, similar in style, but lower in sentiment and diction, presents still that subordinate resemblance and correspondence to that of their superiors, which the worsted lace upon the livery of a servant bears to the embroidery upon the coat of his master.

It is not to mere expression which these remarks are confined; for if we consult the course of human life, we shall find that mirth and sorrow, and events which cause both, are more nearly allied than perhaps it is altogether pleasing to allow. Considered relatively to a spectator, an incident may often excite a mingled emotion, partaking at once of that which is moving, and that which is ludicrous; and there is no reader who has not, at some period of his life, met with events at which he hesitated whether to laugh or to cry. It remains to be proved, why scenes of this dubious, yet interesting description, should be excluded from the legitimate Drama, while their force is acknowledged in that of human life. We acknowledge the difficulty of bringing them upon the scene with their full and corresponding effect. It was, perhaps, under this persuasion, that the Fool, whose wild jests were too much the result of habit and practice to be subdued even by the terrors of the storm, has been banished from the terrific scene of King Lear. But, in yielding to this difficulty, the terrible contrast has been thus destroyed, in which Shakspeare exhibited the half-perceptions of the natural Fool, as contrasted with the assumed insanity of Edgar, and the real madness of the old King. They who prefer to this living variety of emotion, the cold uniformity of a French scene of passion, must be numbered among those who read for the pleasure of criticism, and without hope of partaking the enthusiasm of the poet.

While we differ from French criticism respecting the right to demand an accurate compliance with the unities, and decline to censure that casual intermixture of

comic character which gives at once reality and variety to the Drama, we are no less disposed to condemn the impertinent love-scenes, which these authors have, as a matter of etiquette, introduced into all their tragedies, however alien from the passion on which they are grounded. The French Drama assumed its present form under the auspices of Louis XIV. who aimed at combining all the characters of a hero of romance. The same spirit which inspired the dull monotony of the endless *folios* of Scudery and Calprenede, seemed to dictate to Corneille, and even to Racine, those scenes of frigid metaphysical passion which encumber their best plays. We do not dispute the deep interest which attaches to the passion of love, so congenial to the human breast, when it forms the groundwork of the play; but it is intolerably nauseous to find a dull love tale mingled as an indispensable ingredient in every dramatic plot, however inconsistent with the rest of the piece. The *Amoureux* and *Amoureuse* of the piece come regularly forth to recite their commonplaces of gallantry, in language as cold as it is exaggerated, and as inconsistent with passion and feeling as with propriety and common sense. Even the horrid tale of Œdipus has the misplaced garnishment of a love intrigue between Theseus, brought there for no other purpose, and a certain Dircé, whom, in the midst of the pestilence, he thus gallantly compliments:

> "Quelque ravage affreux qu'étale ici la peste,
> L'absence aux vrais amans est encore plus funeste."

The predominance of a passion which expresses itself so absurdly, is all that the French have condescended to adopt from the age of chivalry, so rich in more dramatic stores; and they have borrowed it in all its pedantry, and without its tenderness and fire. Riccoboni has probably alleged the true reason for the introduction of these heavy scenes of love intrigue, which is, that at little expense of labour to the author, they fill up three quarters of the action of his play. We quote, from the French version, as that immediately before us, and most generally intelligible: "*Par exemple, otons de*

NICOMEDE *les dix scenes de* LAODICE; *de* L'ŒDIPE, *les dix scenes de* DIRCE; *de* POLIEUCTE, *les scenes d'amour de* SEVERE; *de la* PHEDRE *de Monsieur Racine, les six scenes d'*ARICIE,—*et nous verrons que non seulement l'action ne sera point interrompuë, mais qu'elle en sera plus vive; en sorte que l'on verra manifestement, que ces scenes de tendresses n'ont servi qu'à ralentir l'action de la piéce, à la refroidir, et à rendre les heros moins grands. Si, après ces deux meilleurs Tragedies de la France, on examine tous les autres, on connoîtra bien mieux cette verité. Lorsque l'amour fait le sujet de la tragedie, ce sentiment, si interessant par lui-meme, occupe la scene avec raison; j'aime l'amour de* PHEDRE, *mais de* PHEDRE *seule.*" Under this thraldom, the fetters of the French stage long laboured, notwithstanding the noble example of *Athalie*, the chef-d'œuvre of Racine. By the example of Voltaire, in one or two of his best pieces, they have of late ventured occasionally to discard their uninteresting Cupid, whose appearance on the stage as a matter of course and of ceremony, produced as little effect as when his altar and godhead are depicted on the semicircle of a fan.

We have already observed, that the refined, artificial, and affected character of the French tragedy, arose from its immediate connexion with the pleasures and with the presence of an absolute sovereign. From the same circumstance, however, the French stage derived several advantages. A degree of discipline, unknown in other theatres, was early introduced among the French actors; and those of a subordinate rank, who, on the English stage, sometimes exhibit intolerable, contemptuous, and wilful negligence, become compelled, on that of France, to pay the same attention to their parts as their superiors, and to exert what limited talents they possess in the subordinate parts to which they are adapted. The effect of this common diligence upon the scene, is a general harmony and correspondence in its parts, which never fails to strike a stranger with admiration.

The Royal protection, also, early produced on the Parisian stage, an improved and splendid style of scenery, decoration, and accompaniments. The scenes

and machinery which they borrowed from Italy, they improved with their usual alert ingenuity. They were still further improved under the auspices of Voltaire, the first who had the merit of introducing natural and correct costume. Before his time the actors, whether Romans or Scythians, appeared in the full dress of the French court; and Augustus himself was represented in a huge full-bottomed wig, surmounted by a crown of laurel. The strict national costume introduced by Voltaire is now observed. That author has also the merit of excluding the idle crowd of courtiers and men of fashion, who thronged the stage during the time of representation, and formed a sort of semicircle round the actors, leaving them thus but a few yards of an area free for performance, and disconcerting at once the performers and the audience, by the whimsical intermixture of players and spectators. The nerves of those pedants who contended most strenuously for the illusion of the scene, and who objected against its being interrupted by an occasional breach of the dramatic unities, do not appear to have suffered from the singular presence of this Chorus.

It was not decoration and splendour alone which the French stage owed to Louis XIV. Its principal obligation was for that patronage which called forth in its service the talents of Corneille and Racine, the Homer and Virgil of the French Drama. However constrained by pedantic rules; however withheld from using that infinite variety of materials, which national and individual character presented to them; however frequently compelled by system to adopt a pompous, solemn, and declamatory style of dialogue—these distinguished authors still remain the proudest boast of the classical age of France, and a high honour to the European republic of letters. It seems probable that Corneille, if left to the exercise of his own judgment, would have approximated more to the romantic Drama. The *Cid* possesses many of the charms of that species of composition. In the character of Don Gourmas, he has drawn a national portrait of the Spanish nobility, for which very excellence he was subjected to the censure of the

Academy, his national court of criticism. In a general point of view, he seems to have been ambitious of overawing his audience by a display of the proud, the severe, the ambitious, and the terrible. Tyrants and conquerors have never sat to a painter of greater skill; and the romantic tone of feeling which he adopts in his more perfect characters is allied to that of chivalry. But Corneille was deficient in tenderness, in dramatic art, and in the power of moving the passions. His fame, too, was injured by the multiplicity of his efforts to extend it. Critics of his own nation have numbered about twenty of his Dramas, which have little to recommend them; and no foreign reader is very likely to verify or refute the censure, since he must previously read them to an end.

Racine, who began to write when the classical fetters were clinched and rivetted upon the French Drama, did not make that effort of struggling with his chains, which we observe in the elder dramatists; he was strong where Corneille evinced weakness, and weak in the points where his predecessor showed vigour. Racine delineated the passion of love with truth, softness, and fidelity; and his scenes of this sort form the strongest possible contrast with those in which he, as well as Corneille, sacrificed to the dull Cupid of metaphysical romance. In refinement and harmony of versification, Racine has hitherto been unequalled; and his *Athalie* is, perhaps, likely to be generally acknowledged as the most finished production of the French Drama.

Subsequent dramatists, down to the time of Voltaire, were contented with imitating the works of these two great models; until the active and ingenious spirit of that celebrated author seems tacitly to have meditated further experimental alterations than he thought it prudent to defend or to avow. His extreme vivacity and acute intellect were mingled, as is not unfrequent in such temperaments, with a certain nervous timidity, which prevented him from attempting open and bold innovation, even where he felt compliance with existing rules most inconvenient and dispiriting. He borrowed, therefore, liberally from Shakspeare, whose ir-

regularities were the frequent object of his ridicule; and he did not hesitate tacitly to infringe the dramatic unities in his plays, while in his criticism he holds them up as altogether inviolable. While he altered the costume of the stage, and brought it nearer to that of national truth, he made one or two irresolute steps towards the introduction of national character. If we were, indeed, to believe the admirers of Corneille, little remained to be done in this department; he had already, it is said, taught his Romans to speak as Romans, and his Greeks as Greeks; but of such national discrimination foreigners are unable to perceive a trace. His heroes, one and all, talk like men of no peculiar character or distinct age and nation; but, like the other heroes of the French dramatic school, are "all honourable men;" who speak in high, grave, buskined rhimes, where an artificial brilliancy of language, richness of metaphor, and grandeur of sentiment, are substituted for that concise and energetic tone of dialogue, which shows at once the national and individual character of the personage who uses it. In *Mahomet*, *Alzire*, and one or two other pieces, Voltaire has attempted some discrimination of national character; the ground-work, however, is still French; and, under every disguise, whether of the turban of the Ottoman, the feathery crown of the savage, or the silk tunic of the Chinese, the character of that singular people can be easily recognised. Voltaire probably saw the deficiency of the national Drama with his usual acuteness; but, like the ancient philosophers, he contentedly joined in the idolatry which he despised.

It seems, indeed, extremely doubtful, whether the French tragedy can ever be brought many steps nearer to nature. That nation is so unfortunate as to have no poetical language; so that some degree of unnatural exaltation of sentiment is almost necessary to sustain the tone of tragedy at a pitch higher than that of ordinary life. The people are passionately fond of ridicule; their authors are equally afraid of incurring it: they are aware, like their late ruler, that there is but one step betwixt the sublime and the ridiculous; and

they are afraid to aim at the former, lest their attempt falling short, should expose them to derision. They cannot reckon on the mercy or enthusiasm of their audience; and while they banish combats and deaths, and even violent action of any kind from the stage, this seems chiefly on account of the manifest risk, that a people more alive to the ludicrous than the lofty, might laugh when they should applaud. The drunken and dizzy fury with which Richard, as personated by Kean, continues to make the motion of striking after he has lost his weapon, would be caviare to the Parisian parterre. Men must compound with their poets and actors, and pardon something like extravagance, on the score of enthusiasm. But if they are nationally dead to that enthusiasm, they resemble a deaf man listening to eloquence, who is more likely to be moved to laughter by the gestures of the orator, than to catch fire at his passionate declamation.

Above all, the French people are wedded to their own opinions. Each Parisian is, or supposes himself, master of the rules of the critical art; and whatever limitations it imposes on the author, the spectators receive some indemnification from the pleasure of sitting in judgment upon him. To require from a dancer to exhibit his agility without touching any of the lines of a diagram chalked on the floor, would deprive the performance of much ease, strength, and grace; but still the spectator of such a species of dance, might feel a certain interest in watching the dexterity with which the artist avoided treading on the interdicted limits, and a certain pride in detecting occasional infringements. In the same manner, the French critic obtains a triumph from watching the transgressions of the dramatic poet against the laws of Aristotle; equal, perhaps, to the more legitimate pleasure he might have derived from the unfettered exercise of his talents. Upon the whole, the French tragedy, though its regulations seem to us founded in pedantry, and its sentiments to belong to a state of false and artificial refinement, contains, nevertheless, passages of such perfect poetry and exquisite moral beauty, that to hear them declaimed with the art of Talma, can-

not but afford a very high pitch of intellectual gratification.

The French comedy assumed a regular shape about the same period with the tragedy; and Moliere was in his department what Corneille and Racine were in theirs; an original author, approached in excellence by none of those that succeeded him. The form which he assumed for a model was that of the comedy of Menander; and he has copied pretty closely some pieces from the Latin stage. Moliere was endowed by nature with a rich fund of comic humour, which is nowhere more apparent than in those light pieces that are written upon the plan of the Italian masked comedy. In these he has introduced the jealous old Pantaloon; the knavish and mischievous Servant, and some of its other characters. In his regular comedy he soared to a higher pitch. Before his time the art had sought its resources in the multiplicity and bustle of intrigue, escape, and disguise,—or at best, in a comic dialogue, approaching to mere buffoonery. Moliere's satire aimed at a nobler prey; he studied mankind for the purpose of attacking those follies of social life which are best exposed by ridicule. The aim of few satirists has been so legitimate, or pursued with such success. Female vanity, learned pedantry, unreasonable jealousy, the doating and disgraceful passions of old men, avarice, coquetry, slander, the quacks who disgrace medicine, and the knaves who prostitute the profession of the law, were the marks at which his shafts were directed.

Moliere's more regular comedies are limited by the law of unities, and finished with great diligence. It is true, the author found it sometimes necessary tacitly to elude the unity of place, which he durst not openly violate; but, in general, he sacrifices probability to system. In the *Ecole des Femmes*, Arnolph brings his wife into the street, out of the room in which his jealousy has imprisoned her, in order to lecture her upon the circumspection due to her character; which absurdity he is guilty of, that the scene may not be shifted from the open space before his door to her apartment. In general, however, it may be noticed, that the critical unities impose much less

hardship upon the comic than upon the tragic poet. It is much more easy to reconcile the incidents of private life to the unities of time and place, than to compress within their limits the extensive and prolonged transactions which comprehend the revolution of kingdoms and the fate of monarchs. What influence, however, these rules do possess, must operate to cramp and embarrass the comic as well as the tragic writers; to violate and disunite those very probabilities which they affect to maintain; and to occasion a thousand real absurdities rather than grant a conventional license, which seems essential to the freedom of the Drama.

The later comic authors of France seem to have abandoned the track pointed out by Moliere, as if in despair of approaching his excellence. Their comedy, compared with that of other nations, and of their great predecessor, is cramped, and tame, and limited. In this department, as in tragedy, the stage has experienced the inconvenience arising from the influence of the Court. The varied and unbounded field of comic humour which the passions and peculiarities of the lower orders present, was prohibited, as containing subjects of exhibition too low and vulgar for a monarch and his courtiers; and thus the natural, fresh, and varied character of comedy was flung aside, while the heartless vices and polished follies of the great world were substituted in its place. Schlegel has well observed, that the object of French comedy "is no longer life, but society; that perpetual negotiation between conflicting vanities which never ends in a sincere treaty of peace. The embroidered dress, the hat under the arm, and the sword by the side, essentially belong to them; and the whole of the characterization is limited to the folly of the men and the coquetry of the women."

It is scarce in nature that a laughter-loving people should have remained satisfied with an amusement so dull and insipid as their regular comedy. A few years preceding the Revolution, and while the causes of that event were in full fermentation, the *Marriage of Figaro* appeared on the stage. It is a comedy of intrigue; and the dialogue is blended with traits of general and politi-

cal satire, as well as with a tone of licentiousness, which was till then a stranger to the French stage. It was received with a degree of enthusiastic and frantic popularity which nothing but its novelty could have occasioned, for there is little real merit in the composition. Frederick of Prussia, and other admirers of the old theatrical school, were greatly scandalized at so daring an innovation on the regular French comedy. The circumstances which followed have prevented Beaumarchais' example from being imitated; and the laughers have consoled themselves with inferior departments of the Drama. Accordingly, we find the blank supplied by farces, comic operas, and dramatic varieties, in which plots of a light, flimsy, and grotesque character are borne out by the comic humour of the author and comic skill of the actor. Brunet, a comedian of extraordinary powers in this cast of interludes, has at times presumed so far upon his popularity as to season his farce with political allusions. It will scarce be believed that he aimed several shafts at Napoleon when in the height of his power. The boldness, as well as the wit of the actor, secured him the applause of the audience; and such a hold had Brunet of their affections, that an imprisonment of a few hours was the greatest punishment which Buonaparte ventured to inflict upon him. But whatever be the attachment shown to the art in general, the French, like ourselves, rest the character of their theatre chiefly upon the ancient specimens of the Drama; and the regular tragedy, as well as comedy, seems declining in that kingdom.

As the Drama of France was formed under the patronage of the monarch, and bears the strongest proofs of its courtly origin, that of England, which was encouraged by the people at large, retains equally unequivocal marks of its popular descent. Its history must naturally draw to some length, as being that part of our essay likely to be most interesting to the reader. In part, however, we have paved the way for it by the details common to the rise of dramatic art in the other nations of Europe. We shall distinguish the English Drama as divided into four periods, premising that this is merely a

general and not a precise division. The taste which governed each period, and the examples on which it is grounded, will usually be found to have dawned in the period preceding that in which it was received and established.

I. From the revival of the theatre until the great Civil War.

II. From the Restoration to the reign of Queen Anne.

III. From the earlier part of the last century down to the present reign.

IV. The present state of the British Drama.

I. The Drama of England commenced, as we have already observed, upon the Spanish model. *Ferrex and Porrex* was the first composition approaching to a regular tragedy; and it was acted before Queen Elizabeth, upon the 18th of January 1561, by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple. It partakes rather of the character of a historical than of a classical Drama; although more nearly allied to the latter class, than the chronicle plays which afterwards took possession of the stage. We have already recorded Sir Philip Sidney's commendation of this play, which he calls by the name of *Gorboduc*, from one of the principal characters. Acted by a learned body, and written in great part by Lord Sackville, the principal author of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, the first of English tragedies assumed in some degree the honours of the learned buskin; but although a Chorus was presented according to the classical model, the play was free from the observance of the unities; and contains many irregularities severely condemned by the regular critics.

English comedy, considered as a regular composition, is said to have commenced with *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. This "right pithy, pleasant, and merry comedy," was the supposed composition of John Still, Master of Arts, and afterwards Bishop of Bath and Wells. It was acted in Christ-Church College, Cambridge, 1575. It is a piece of low humour; the whole jest turning upon the loss and recovery of the needle with which Gammer Gurton was to repair the breeches of her man Hodge; but, in point

of manners, it is a great curiosity, as the *curta suppellex* of our ancestors is scarcely anywhere so well described. The popular characters also, the Sturdy Beggar, the Clown, the Country Vicar, and the Shrew, of the sixteenth century, are drawn in colours taken from the life. The unity of time, place, and action, are observed through the play, with an accuracy of which France might be jealous. The time, is a few hours—the place, the open square of the village before Gammer Gurton's door—the action, the loss of the needle—and this, followed by the search for and final recovery of that necessary implement, is intermixed with no other thwarting or subordinate interest, but is progressive from the commencement to the conclusion.

It is remarkable, that the earliest English tragedy and comedy are both works of considerable merit; that each partakes of the distinct character of its class; that the tragedy is without intermixture of comedy; the comedy without any intermixture of tragedy.

These models were followed by a variety of others, in which no such distinctions were observed. Numerous theatres sprung up in different parts of the metropolis, opened upon speculation by distinct troops of performers. Their number shows how much they interested public curiosity; for men never struggle for a share in a losing profession. They acted under licenses, which appear to have been granted for the purpose of police alone, not of exclusive privilege or monopoly; since London contained, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, no fewer than fourteen distinct companies of players, with very considerable privileges and remunerations. See Drake's *Shakspeare and his Times*, vol. II. p. 205.

The public, therefore, in the widest sense of the word, was at once arbiter and patron of the Drama. The companies of players who traversed the country, might indeed assume the name of some peer or baron, for the sake of introduction or protection; but those of the metropolis do not, at this early period of our dramatic history, appear to have rested in any considerable degree upon learned or aristocratic privilege. Their

license was obtained from the crown, but their success depended upon the voice of the people; and the pieces which they brought forward were, of course, adapted to popular taste. It followed necessarily that histories and romantic Dramas were the favourites of the period. A general audience in an unlearned age requires rather amusement than conformity to rules, and is more displeased with a tiresome uniformity than shocked with the breach of all the unities. The players and dramatists, before the rise of Shakspeare, followed, of consequence, the taste of the public; and dealt in the surprising, elevating, and often bombastic incidents of tragedy, as well as in the low humour and grotesque situations of the comic scene. Where these singly were found to lack attraction, they mingled them together, and dashed their tragic plot with an under-intrigue of the lowest buffoonery, without any respect to taste or congruity.

The clown was no stranger to the stage; he interfered, without ceremony, in the most heart-rending scenes, to the scandal of the more learned spectators.

> Now lest such frightful shows of fortune's fall,
> And bloody tyrant's rage should chance appall
> The death-struck audience, 'midst the silent rout,
> Comes leaping in a self-misformed lout,
> And laughs and grins, and frames his mimic face,
> And jostles straight into the prince's place;
> Then doth the theatre echo all aloud,
> With gladsome noise of that applauding crowd,
> A goodly hotchpotch, where vile russettings
> Are matched with monarchs and with mighty kings.

An ancient stage-trick, illustrative of the mixture of tragic and comic action in Shakspeare's time, was long preserved in the theatre. Henry IV. holding council before the battle of Shrewsbury, was always represented as seated on a drum; and when he rose and came forward to address his nobles, the place was occupied by Falstaff; a practical jest which seldom failed to produce a laugh from the galleries. The taste and judgment of the author himself was very different. During the whole scene, Falstaff gives only once, and under irresistible temptation, the rein to his petulant wit, and

it is instantly checked by the prince; to whom, by the way, and not to the king, his words ought to be addressed.

The English stage might be considered equally without rule and without model when Shakspeare arose. The effect of the genius of an individual upon the taste of a nation is mighty; but that genius, in its turn, is formed according to the opinions prevalent at the period when it comes into existence. Such was the case with Shakspeare. Had he received an education more extensive, and possessed a taste refined by the classical models, it is probable that he also, in admiration of the ancient Drama, might have mistaken the form for the essence, and subscribed to those rules which had produced such masterpieces of art. Fortunately for the full exertion of a genius, as comprehensive and versatile as intense and powerful, Shakspeare had no access to any models of which the commanding merit might have controlled and limited his own exertions. He followed the path which a nameless crowd of obscure writers had trodden before him; but he moved in it with the grace and majestic step of a being of a superior order; and vindicated for ever the British theatre from a pedantic restriction to classical rule. Nothing went before Shakspeare which in any respect was fit to fix and stamp the character of a national Drama; and certainly no one will succeed him capable of establishing, by mere authority, a form more restricted than that which Shakspeare used.

Such is the action of existing circumstances upon genius, and the reaction of genius upon future circumstances. Shakspeare and Corneille was each the leading spirit of his age; and the difference between them is well marked by the editor of the latter:—"*Corneille est inégal comme Shakespeare, et plein de genie comme lui: mais le genie de Corneille étoit à celui de Shakespeare ce qu'un seigneur est à l'egard d'un* homme *de* peuple *né avec le même esprit que lui.*" This distinction is strictly accurate, and contains a compliment to the English author which, assuredly, the critic did not intend to make. Corneille wrote as a courtier, circumscribed within the imaginary rules and ceremonies of a court, as a chicken

is by a circle of chalk drawn round it. Shakspeare, composing for the amusement of the public alone, had within his province, not only the inexhaustible field of actual life, but the whole ideal world of fancy and superstition;—more favourable to the display of poetical genius than even existing realities. Under the circumstances of Corneille, Shakspeare must have been restricted to the same dull, regular, and unvaried system. He must have written, not according to the dictates of his own genius, but in conformity to the mandate of some *Intendant des menus plaisirs;* or of some minister of state, who, like Cardinal Richelieu, thought he could write a tragedy because he could govern a kingdom. It is not equally clear to what height Corneille might have ascended, had he enjoyed the national immunities of Shakspeare. Each pitched down a land-mark in his art. The circle of Shakspeare was so extensive, that it is with advantage liable to many restrictions; that of Corneille included a narrow limit, which his successors have deemed it unlawful to enlarge.

It is not our intention, within the narrow space to which our essay is necessarily limited, to enlarge upon the character and writings of Shakspeare. We can only notice his performances as events in the history of the theatre—of a gigantic character, indeed, so far as its dignity, elevation, and importance are considered; but, in respect of the mere practice of the Drama, rather fixing and sanctioning, than altering or reforming, those rules and forms which he found already established. This we know for certain, that those historical plays or chronicles, in which Shakspeare's muse has thrown a never-fading light upon the history of his country, did, almost every one of them, exist before him in the rude shape of dry dialogue and pitiful buffoonery, stitched into scenes by the elder play-wrights of the stage. His romantic Dramas exhibit the same contempt of regularity which was manifested by Marlow, and other writers; for where there was abuse or extreme license upon the stage, the example of Shakspeare may be often quoted as its sanction, never as tending to reform it. In these particulars the practice of our im-

mortal bard was contrasted with that of Ben Jonson, a severe and somewhat pedantic scholar;—a man whose mind was coarse, though possessing both strength and elevation, and whose acute perception of comic humour was tinctured with vulgarity.

Jonson's tragic strength consists in a sublime, and sometimes harsh, expression of moral sentiment; but displays little of tumultuous and ardent passion, still less of tenderness or delicacy; although there are passages in which he seems adequate to expressing them. He laboured in the mine of the classics, but overloaded himself with the ore, which he could not, or would not, refine. His *Catiline* and *Sejanus* are laboured translations from Cicero, Sallust, and Tacitus, which his own age did not endure, and which no succeeding generation will be probably much tempted to revive. With the stern superiority of learning over ignorance, he asserted himself a better judge of his own productions, than the public which condemned him, and haughtily claimed the laurel which the general suffrage often withheld; but the world has as yet shown no disposition to reverse the opinion of their predecessors.

In comedy, Jonson made some efforts partaking of the character of the older comedy of the Grecians. In his *Tale of a Tub*, he follows the path of Aristophanes, and lets his wit run into low buffoonery, that he might bring upon the stage Inigo Jones, his personal enemy. In *Cynthia's Revells*, and *The Staple of News*, we find him introducing the dull personification of abstract passions and qualities, and turning legitimate comedy into an allegorical mask. What interest can the reader have in such characters as the three Penny boys, and their transactions with the Lady Pecunia? Some of Jonson's more legitimate comedies may be also taxed here with filthiness of language; of which disgusting attribute his works exhibit more instances, than those of any English writer of eminence, excepting Swift. Let us, however, be just to a master-spirit of his age. The comic force of Jonson was strong, marked, and peculiar; and he excelled even Shakspeare himself in drawing that class of truly English characters, remarkable for pecu-

liarity of *humour*;—that is, for some mode of thought, speech, and behaviour, superinduced upon the natural disposition, by profession, education, or fantastical affectation of singularity. In blazoning these forth with their natural attributes and appropriate language, Ben Jonson has never been excelled; and his works everywhere exhibit a consistent and manly moral, resulting naturally from the events of the scene.

It must also be remembered, that, although it was Jonson's fate to be eclipsed by the superior genius, energy, and taste of Shakspeare, yet those advantages which enabled him to maintain an honourable though an unsuccessful struggle, were of high advantage to the Drama. Jonson was the first who showed, by example, the infinite superiority of a well-conceived plot, all the parts of which bore upon each other, and forwarded an interesting conclusion, over a tissue of detached scenes, following without necessary connexion or increase of interest. The plot of *The Fox* is admirably conceived; and that of *The Alchymist*, though faulty in the conclusion, is nearly equal to it. In the two comedies of *Every Man in his Humour*, and *Every Man out of his Humour*, the plot deserves much less praise, and is deficient at once in interest and unity of action; but in that of *The Silent Woman*, nothing can exceed the art with which the circumstance upon which the conclusion turns, is, until the very last scene, concealed from the knowledge of the reader, while he is tempted to suppose it constantly within his reach. In a word, Jonson is distinguished by his strength and stature, even in those days when there were giants in the land; and affords the model of a close, animated, and characteristic style of comedy, abounding in moral satire, and distinguished at once by force and art, which was afterwards more cultivated by English dramatists, than the lighter, more wild, and more fanciful department in which Shakspeare moved, beyond the reach of emulation.

The general opinion of critics has assigned genius as the characteristic of Shakspeare, and art as the appropriate excellence of Jonson; not, surely, that Jonson

was deficient in genius, but that art was the principal characteristic of his laborious scenes. We learn from his own confession, and from the panegyrics of his friends, as well as the taunts of his enemies, that he was a slow composer: The natural result of laborious care is jealousy of fame; for that which we do with labour, we value highly when achieved. Shakspeare, on the other hand, appears to have composed rapidly and carelessly; and, sometimes, even without considering, while writing the earlier acts, how the catastrophe was to be huddled up, in that which was to conclude the piece. We may fairly conclude him to have been indifferent about fame, who would take so little pains to win it. Much, perhaps, might have been achieved by the union of these opposed qualities, and by blending the art of Jonson with the fiery invention and fluent expression of his great contemporary. But such a union of opposite excellencies in the same author was hardly to be expected; nor, perhaps, would the result have proved altogether so favourable, as might at first view be conceived. We should have had more perfect specimens of the art; but they must have been much fewer in number; and posterity would certainly have been deprived of that rich luxuriance of dramatic excellencies and poetic beauties, which, like wild flowers upon a common field, lie scattered profusely among the unacted plays of Shakspeare.

Although incalculably superior to his contemporaries, Shakspeare had successful imitators, and the art of Jonson was not unrivalled. Massinger appears to have studied the works of both, with the intention of uniting their excellencies. He knew the strength of plot; and although his plays are altogether irregular, yet he well understood the advantage of a strong and defined interest; and in unravelling the intricacy of his intrigues, he often displays the management of a master. Art, therefore, not perhaps in its technical, but in its most valuable sense, was Massinger's as well as Jonson's; and, in point of composition, many passages of his plays are not unworthy of Shakspeare. Were we to distinguish Massinger's peculiar excellence, we should name that first

of dramatic attributes, a full conception of character, a strength in bringing out, and consistency in adhering to it. He does not, indeed, always introduce his personages to the audience, in their own proper character; it dawns forth gradually in the progress of the piece, as in the hypocritical Luke, or in the heroic Marullo. But, upon looking back, we are always surprised and delighted to trace from the very beginning, intimations of what the personage is to prove, as the play advances. There is often a harshness of outline, however, in the characters of this dramatist, which prevents their approaching to the natural and easy portraits bequeathed us by Shakspeare.

Beaumont and Fletcher, men of remarkable talent, seemed to have followed Shakspeare's mode of composition, rather than Jonson's, and thus to have altogether neglected that art which Jonson taught, and which Massinger in some sort practised. They may, indeed, be rather said to have taken for their model the boundless license of the Spanish stage, from which many of their pieces are expressly and avowedly derived. The acts of their plays are so detached from each other, in substance and consistency, that the plot scarce can be said to hang together at all, or to have, in any sense of the word, a beginning, progress, and conclusion. It seems as if the play began, because the curtain rose, and ended because it fell; the author, in the meantime, exerting his genius for the amusement of the spectators, pretty much in the same manner, as, in the *Scenario* of the Italians, by the actors filling up, with their extempore wit, the scenes chalked out for them. To compensate for this excess of irregularity, the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher have still a high poetical value. If character be sometimes violated, probability discarded, and the interest of the plot neglected, the reader is, on the other hand, often gratified by the most beautiful description, the most tender and passionate dialogue; a display of brilliant wit and gaiety, or a feast of comic humour. These attributes had so much effect on the public, that, during the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, many of Beaumont

and Fletcher's plays had possession of the stage, while those of Shakspeare were laid upon the shelf.

Shirley, Ford, Webster, Decker, and others, added performances to the early treasures of the English Drama, which abound with valuable passages. There never, probably, rushed into the lists of literary composition together, a band more distinguished for talent. If the early Drama be inartificial and unequal, no nation, at least, can show so many detached scenes, and even acts, of high poetical merit. One powerful cause seems to have produced an effect so marked and distinguished; to wit, the universal favour of a theatrical public, which daily and nightly thronged the numerous theatres then open in the city of London.

In considering this circumstance, it must above all be remembered, that these numerous audiences crowded, not to feast their eyes upon show and scenery, but to see and hear the literary production of the evening. The scenes which the stage exhibited, were probably of the most paltry description. Some rude helps to the imagination of the audience might be used, by introducing the gate of a castle or town;—the monument of the Capulets, by sinking a trap-door, or by thrusting in a bed. The good-natured audience readily received these hints, with that conventional allowance, which Sir Philip Sidney had ridiculed, and which Shakspeare himself has alluded to, when he appeals from the poverty of theatrical representation to the excited imagination of his audience.

> ——————— Can this cockpit hold
> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
> Within this wooden O, the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?
> O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
> Attest, in little space, a million;
> And let us, ciphers to this great account,
> On your imaginary forces work;
> Suppose, within the girdle of these walls
> Are now confin'd two mighty monarchies,
> Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
> The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder;
> Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.
> For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,

> Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times;
> Turning the accomplishment of many years
> Into an hour-glass.——

Such were the allowances demanded by Shakspeare and his contemporaries from the public of their day, in consideration of the imperfect means and appliances of their theatrical machinery. Yet the deficiency of scenery and show, which, when existing in its utmost splendour, divides the interest of the piece in the mind of the ignorant, and rarely affords much pleasure to a spectator of taste, may have been rather an advantage to the infant Drama. The spectators, having nothing to withdraw their attention from the immediate business of the piece, gave it their full and uninterrupted attention. And here it may not be premature to enquire into the characteristical difference between the audiences of the present day, and of those earlier theatrical ages, when the Drama boasted not only the names of Shakspeare, of Massinger, of Jonson, of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Shirley, of Ford; but others of subordinate degree, the meanest of whom shows occasionally more fire than warms whole reams of modern plays. This will probably be found to rest on the varied and contrasted feelings with which the audience of ancient and that of modern days attend the progress of the scene.

Nothing, indeed, is more certain, than that the general cast of theatrical composition must receive its principal bent and colouring from the taste of the audience:

> The Drama's laws, the Drama's patrons give;
> For those who live to please, must please to live.

But though this be an undeniable, and in some respects a melancholy truth, it is not less certain, that genius, labouring in behalf of the public, possesses the power of re-action, and of influencing, in its turn, that taste to which it is in some respects obliged to conform; while, on the other hand, the play-wright, who aims only to catch the passing plaudit and the profit of a season, by addressing himself exclusively to the ruling predilections of the audience, degrades the public taste still further, by the gross food which he ministers to it; un-

less it shall be supposed that he may contribute involuntarily to rouse it from its degeneracy, by cramming it even to satiety and loathing. This action, therefore, and re-action, of the taste of the age on dramatic writing, and *vice versa*, must both be kept in view, when treating of the difference betwixt the days of Shakspeare and our own.

Perhaps it is the leading distinction betwixt the ancient and modern audiences, that the former came to listen, and to admire; to fling the reins of their imaginations into the hands of the author and actors, and to be pleased, like the reader to whom Sterne longed to do homage, "they knew not why, and cared not wherefore." The novelty of dramatic entertainments (for there elapsed only about twenty years betwixt the date of *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, accounted the earliest English play, and the rise of Shakspeare,) must have had its natural effect upon the audience. The sun of Shakspeare arose almost without a single gleam of intervening twilight: and it was no wonder that the audience, introduced to this enchanting and seductive art at once, under such an effulgence of excellence, should have been more disposed to wonder than to criticise; to admire—or rather to adore—than to measure the height, or ascertain the course, of the luminary which diffused such glory around him. The great number of theatres in London, and the profusion of varied talent which was dedicated to this service, attest the eagerness of the public to enjoy the entertainments of the scene. The ruder amusements of the age lost their attractions; and the royal bear-ward of Queen Elizabeth lodged a formal complaint at the feet of her majesty, that the play-houses had seduced the audience from his periodical bear-baitings! This fact is worth a thousand conjectures; and we can hardly doubt, that the converts, transported by their improving taste from the bear-garden to the theatre, must, generally speaking, have felt their rude minds subdued and led captive by the superior intelligence, which not only placed on the stage at pleasure all ranks, all ages, all tempers, all passions of mere humanity, but extended its powers beyond the

bounds of time and space, and seemed to render visible to mortal eyes the secrets of the invisible world. We may, perhaps, form the best guess of the feelings of Shakspeare's contemporary audience, by recollecting the emotions of any rural friend of rough, but sound sense, and ardent feelings, whom we have had the good fortune to conduct to a theatre for the first time in his life. It may be well imagined, that such a spectator thinks little of the three dramatic unities, of which Aristotle says so little, and his commentators and followers talk so much; and that the poet and the performers have that enviable influence over his imagination, which transports him from place to place at pleasure; crowds years into the course of hours, and interests him in the business of each scene, however disconnected from the others. His eyes are rivetted to the stage, his ears drink in the accents of the speakers, and he experiences in his mature age, what we have all felt in childhood —a sort of doubt whether the beings and business of the scene be real or fictitious. In this state of delightful fascination, Shakspeare and the gigantic dramatic champions of his age, found the British public at large; and how they availed themselves of the advantages which so favourable a temper afforded them, their works will show so long as the language of Britain continues to be read. It is true, that the enthusiastic glow of the public admiration, like the rays of a tropical sun darted upon a rich soil, called up in profusion weeds as well as flowers; and that, spoiled in some degree by the indulgent acceptation which attended their efforts, even our most admired writers of Elizabeth's age not unfrequently exceeded the bounds of critical nicety, and even of common taste and decorum. But these eccentricities were atoned for by a thousand beauties, to which, fettered by the laws of the classic Drama, the authors would hardly have aspired, or, aspiring, would hardly have attained. All of us know and feel how much the exercise of our powers, especially those which rest on keen feelings and self-confidence, is dependent upon a favourable reception from those for whom they are put in action. Every one has observed

how a cold brow can damp the brilliancy of wit and fetter the flow of eloquence; and how both are induced to send forth sallies corresponding in strength and fire, upon being received by the kindred enthusiasm of those whom they have addressed. And thus, if we owe to the indiscriminate admiration with which the Drama was at first received, the irregularities of the authors by whom it was practised, we also stand indebted to it, in all probability, for many of its beauties, which became of rare occurrence, when, by a natural, and indeed a necessary change, satiated admiration began to give way to other feelings.

When a child is tired of playing with a new toy, its next delight is to examine how it is constructed; and, in like manner, so soon as the first burst of public admiration is over with respect to any new mode of composition, the next impulse prompts us to analyze and to criticise what was at first the subject of vague and indiscriminate wonder. In the first instance, the toy is generally broken to pieces; in the other, while the imagination of the authors is subjected to the rigid laws of criticism, the public generally lose in genius what they may gain in point of taste. The author who must calculate upon severe criticism, turns his thoughts more to avoid faults than to attain excellence; as he who is afraid to stumble must avoid rapid motion. The same process takes place in all the fine arts: their first productions are distinguished by boldness and irregularity; those which succeed by a better and more correct taste, but also by inferior and less original genius.

The original school founded by Shakspeare and Ben Jonson, continued by Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher, Shirley, Ford, and others, whose compositions are distinguished by irregularity as well as genius, was closed by the breaking out of the great civil war in 1642. The stage had been the constant object of reprobation and abhorrence on the part of the Puritans, and its professors had no favour to expect at their hands if victorious. We read, therefore, with interest, but without surprise, that almost all the actors took up arms in behalf of their old master King Charles, in whose service

most of them perished. Robinson, a principal actor at the Blackfriars, was killed by Harrison in cold blood, and under the application of a text of scripture,—"Cursed is he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently." A few survivors endeavoured occasionally to practise their art in secrecy and obscurity, but were so frequently discovered, plundered, and stripped by the soldiers, that "*Enter the red-coat, Exit hat and cloak,*" was too frequent a stage direction. Sir William Davenant endeavoured to evade the severe zealots of the time, by representing a sort of opera, said to have been the first Drama in which moveable scenery was introduced upon the stage. Even the cavaliers of the more grave sort disapproved of the revival of these festive entertainments during the unstable and melancholy period of the interregnum. "I went," says the excellent Evelyn, in his *Diary*, 5th May 1658, "to see a new opera after the Italian way; in recitation, music, and scenes, much inferior to the Italian composure and magnificence; but it was prodigious that in such a time of public consternation, such a variety should be kept up or permitted, and being engaged with company, could not decently resist the going to see it, though my heart smote me for it." Davenant's theatrical enterprise, abhorred by the fanaticism of the one party, and ill adapted to the dejected circumstances of the other, was not probably very successful.

II. With royalty, the stage revived in England. But the theatres in the capital were limited to two, a restriction which has never since been extended. This was probably by the advice of Clarendon, who endeavoured, though vainly, to stem at all points the flood of idle gaiety and dissipation which broke in after the Restoration. The example of France might reconcile Charles to this exertion of royal authority. With this restoration of the Drama, as well as of the crown, commences the second part of English dramatic history.

Charles II. had been accustomed to enjoy the foreign stage during his exile, and had taste enough to relish its beauties. It is probable, however, that his judgment

was formed upon the French model, for few of the historical or romantic Dramas were revived at the Restoration. So early as 26th November 1662, the *Diary* of Evelyn contains this entry: "I saw Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, played, but now the old plays began to disgust this refined age, since his Majesty has been so long abroad." Dryden, Howard, and others, who obtained possession of the stage, introduced what was for some time called Heroic Plays, written in couplets, and turning upon the passions of love and honour. In the dialogue, these pieces resembled that of the French stage, where the actors declaim alternately in the best language, and in the finest thoughts, which the poet can supply; but without much trace of natural passion or propriety of character. But though French in dialogue and sentiment, the heroic plays were English in noise and bustle, and the lack of truth and nature was supplied by trumpets and tempests, victories, and processions. An entertainment of a character so forced and unnatural, was obviously of foreign growth, and flowed from the court. Dryden himself has assured us, "that the favour which heroic plays had acquired upon the stage, was entirely owing to the countenance which they had received at court; and that the most eminent persons for wit and humour in the royal circle had so far honoured them, that they judged no way so fit as verse to entertain a noble audience, or express a noble passion." In these pieces the unities were not observed; but in place of the classical restrictions, there were introduced certain romantic whimsical limitations of the dramatic art, which, had they been adopted, must soon have destroyed all its powers of pleasing. The characters were avowedly formed upon the model of the French romance, where honour was a sort of insane gasconading extravagance, and who seem to have made a vow never to speak or think of any thing but love; and that in language sometimes ingeniously metaphysical, sometimes puerile to silliness, sometimes mad even to raving, but always absurd, unnatural, and extravagant. In point of system it was stated, that a heroic play should be an imitation of a heroic poem. The laws of

such compositions did not, it was said, dispense with those of the elder drama, but exalted them, and obliged the poet to draw all things as far above the ordinary proportion of the stage, as the stage itself is beyond the common words and actions of human life. The effects which a heroic play, constructed upon such an overstrained model, produced, is well described by Mrs. Evelyn, wife of the author of that name already quoted, in a letter to *Mr. Bohun*, written in 1671: "Since my last to you I have seen the *Siege of Grenada*, a play so full of ideas, that the most refined romance I ever read is not to compare with it. Love is made so pure, and valour so nice, that one would imagine it designed for an Utopia rather than our stage. I do not quarrel with the poet, but admire one born in the decline of morality should be able to feign such exact virtue; and as poetic fiction has been instructive in former ages, I wish this the same event in ours. As to the strict law of comedy I dare not pretend to judge. Some think the division of the story not so well as if it could all have been comprehended in the day of action. Truth of history, exactness of time, possibilities of adventures, are niceties which the ancient critics might require, but those who have outdone them in fine notions may be allowed the liberty to express them their own way, and the present world is so enlightened that the old dramatique must bear no sway. This account perhaps is not enough to do *Mr. Driden* right, yet is as much as you can expect from the leisure of one who has the care of a nursery." (See Evelyn's *Works*.) This ingenious lady felt what, over-awed by the fashion of the moment, she has intimated rather than expressed; namely, that the Heroic Drama, notwithstanding the fine poetry of which it may be made the vehicle, was overstrained, fantastical, and unnatural.

In comedy, also, there was evinced, subsequent to the Restoration, a kindred desire of shining in dialogue, rather than attempting the humorous delineation of character of which Shakspeare, Jonson, and the earlier school, had set the example. The comic author no longer wrote to move the hearty laugh of a popular

assembly, but to please a fashionable circle, "the men of wit and pleasure about town;" with whom wit and raillery is always more prevailing than humour. As in tragedy, therefore, the authors exhausted trope and figure, and reduced to jogic the language of heroic passion; so in comedy, a succession of smart jests, which never served to advance the action of the piece, or display the character of the speaker, were bandied to and fro upon the stage.

Satire is the appropriate corrective of extravagance in composition, and *The Rehearsal* of the Duke of Buckingham, though it can scarcely be termed a work of uncommon power, had yet the effect of holding up to public ridicule, the marked and obvious absurdities of the revived Drama in both its branches. After the appearance of this satire, a taste too extravagant for long endurance was banished from the theatre; both tragedy and comedy retraced their steps, and approached more nearly to the field of human action, passion, and suffering; and down to the Revolution, a more natural style of Drama occupied the stage. It was supported by men of the highest genius; who, but for one great leading error, might perhaps have succeeded in giving to the art its truest and most energetic character. The talents of Otway, in his scenes of passionate affection, rival, at least, and sometimes excel, those of Shakspeare. More tears have been shed, probably, for the sorrows of Belvidera and Monimia, than for those of Juliet and Desdemona. The introduction of actresses upon the stage was scarce known before the Restoration, and it furnished the poets of the latter period with appropriate representatives for their female characters. This more happy degree of personification, as it greatly increased the perfection of the scene, must have animated, in proportion, the genius of the author. A marked improvement, therefore, may be traced in love scenes, and, indeed, in all those wherein female characters are introduced; that which was to be spoken by a fitting representative was, of course, written with more care, as it was acted with greater effect. This was an advantage, and a great one, possessed by the theatre suc-

ceeding the Restoration. Great force and vigour marked the dramatic compositions of this age. They were not, indeed, equal to those of Shakspeare, either in point of the talent called forth, or the quantity of original poetry given to the public; but Otway, and even Lee, notwithstanding his bombastic rant, possessed considerable knowledge of dramatic art and of stage-effect. Several plays of this period have kept possession of the stage; less, perhaps, on account of intrinsic merits, than because some of the broad errors of the earlier age had been removed, and a little more art had been introduced in the combination of the scenes, and disentanglement of the plot. The voice of criticism was frequently heard; the dramatic rules of the ancients were known and quoted; and though not recognised in their full extent, had nevertheless some influence in regulating the action of the Drama.

In one heinous article, however, the poets of this age sinned at once against virtue, good taste, and decorum; and endangered, by the most profligate and shameless indecency, the cause of morality, which has been often considered as nearly allied with that of the legitimate Drama. In the first period of the British stage, the actors were men of decent character, and often acquired considerable independence. The women's parts were acted by boys. Hence, although there were too many instances of low and licentious dialogue, there were few of that abominable species which addresses itself not to the fancy but to the passions; and is seductive, instead of being ludicrous. Had Charles II. borrowed from the French monarchy the severe etiquette of their court, when he introduced into England something resembling the style of their plays, he would have asserted what was due to his own dignity, and the cause of sound morals and good manners, by prohibiting this vulgar and degrading license, which in itself was insulting to the presence of a king. It was, however, this prince's lot, in the regulation of his amusements, as well as in his state government, to neglect self-respectability. In his exile, he had been "merry, scandalous, and poor;" had been habituated to share familiarly coarse jests and

loose pleasures with his dissolute companions; and, unfortunately, he saw no reason for disusing the license to which he had accustomed himself, when it was equally destructive to his own character and to decorum. What had been merely coarse was under his influence, rendered vicious and systematic impurity. Scenes, both passionate and humorous, were written in such a style, as if the author had studied, whether the grave seduction of the heroic, or the broad infamy of the comic scenes, should contain the grossest insult to public decency. The female performers were of a character proper to utter whatever ribaldry the poet chose to put into their mouths; and, as they practised what they taught, the King himself, and the leading courtiers, formed connexions which gave the actresses a right to be saucy in their presence, and to reckon upon their countenance when practising in public the effrontery which marked their intercourse in private life. How much this shocked the real friends of Charles, is shown by its effects upon Evelyn, whose invaluable *Diary* we have already quoted:—"This night was acted my Lord Broghill's tragedy, called Mustapha, before their Majesties at court, at which I was present; though very seldom now going to the public theatres, for many reasons, as they are now abused to an atheistical liberty. Foul and indecent women now, and never till now, are permitted to appear and act, who, inflaming several young noblemen and gallants, became their misses and some their wives —witness the Earl of Oxford, Sir R. Howard, P. Rupert, the Earl of Dorset, and another greater person than any of them, who fell into their snares, to the reproach of their noble families, and ruin of both body and soul." He elsewhere repeatedly expresses his grief and disgust at the pollution and degeneracy of the stage. (Evelyn's *Works*, vol. I. p. 392.) In a letter to Lord Cornbury (son of the great Clarendon) he thus expresses himself:—"In the town of London, there are more wretched and indecent plays permitted, than in all the world besides;" and adds, shortly after, "If my Lord Chancellor would but be instrumental in reforming this one exorbitancy, it would gain both the King and his Lordship

multitudes of blessings. You know, my Lord, that I (who have written plays, and am a scurvy poet, too, sometimes) am far from Puritanisme; but I would have no reproach left our adversaries, in a theme which may so conveniently be reformed. Plays are now with us become a licentious exercise, and a vice, and neede severe cencors, that should look as well to their morality, as to their lines and numbers."—And, at the hazard of multiplying quotations, we cannot suppress the following,—1st March 1671:—"I walked with him (the King) through St. James's Park, to the garden, where I both heard and saw a very familiar discourse betwixt —— (*i. e.* the King) and Mrs. Nelly (Gwyn) as they called an impudent comedian, she looking out of her terrace at the top of the wall, and —— (the King) standing in the green walk under it. I was heartily sorry at this scene."

The foul stain, so justly censured by a judge so competent, and so moderate as Evelyn, was like that of the leprosy in the Levitical Law, which sunk into and pervaded the very walls of the mansion; it became the leading characteristic of the English theatre, of its authors, and of its players. It was, however, especially in comedy, that this vice was most manifest; and, to say truth, were not the eyes of antiquaries, like the ears of confessors, free from being sullied by the impurities subjected to them, the comedies of this period, as well as the comic scenes introduced to relieve the tragedies, are fitter for a brothel, than for the library of a man of letters.

It is a pity that we are under the necessity of drawing the character of the Drama, at this age, from a feature so coarse and disgusting. Unquestionably, as the art in other respects made progress, it might, but for this circumstance, have reached an uncommon pitch of perfection. The comedies of Congreve contain probably more wit than was ever before embodied upon the stage; each word was a jest, and yet so characteristic, that the repartee of the servant is distinguished from that of the master; the jest of the coxcomb from that of the humorist or fine gentleman of the piece. Had

not Sheridan lived in our own time, we could not have conceived the possibility of rivalling the comedies of Congreve. This distinguished author understood the laws of composition, and combined his intrigue with a degree of skill unusual on the British stage. Nor was he without his rivals, even where his eminence was most acknowledged. Vanburgh and Farquhar, inferior to Congreve in real wit, and falling into the next period, were, perhaps, his equals in the composition of acting plays. Like other powerful stimulants, the use of wit has its bounds, which Congreve is supposed sometimes to have exceeded. His dialogue keeps the attention too much upon the stretch, and, however delightful in the closet, fatigues the mind during the action. When you are perpetually conscious that you lose something by the slightest interruption of your attention, whether by accident or absence of mind, it is a state of excitement too vivid and too constant to be altogether pleasant; and we feel it possible, that we might sometimes wish to exchange a companion of such brilliant powers, for one who would afford us more repose and relaxation.

The light, lively, but somewhat more meagre dialogue of the later dramatists of the period, and of that which succeeded, was found sufficient to interest, yet was not so powerful as to fatigue, the audience. Vanburgh and Farquhar seem to have written more from the portraits of ordinary life; Congreve from the force of his own conception. The former, therefore, drew the characters of men and women as they found them; selected, united, and heightened for the purpose of effect; but without being enriched with any brilliancy foreign to their nature. But all the personages of Congreve have a glimpse of his own fire, and of his own acuteness. He could not entirely lay aside his quick powers of perception and reply, even when he painted a clown or a coxcomb; and all that can be objected, saving in a moral sense, to this great author, is, his having been too prodigal of his wit; a faculty used by most of his successors with rigid economy.

That personification of fantasy or whim, called characters of humour, which Ben Jonson introduced, was re-

vived during this period. Shadwell, now an obscure name, endeavoured to found himself a reputation, by affecting to maintain the old school, and espousing the cause of Ben Jonson against Dryden and other innovators. But although there was considerable force of humour in some of his forgotten plays, it was Wycherly upon whom fell the burden of upholding the standard of the Jonsonian school. *The Plain Dealer* is, indeed, imitated from Moliere; but the principal character has more the force of a real portrait, and is better contrasted with the perverse, bustling, masculine, pettifogging, and litigious character of Widow Blackackre, than Alceste is with any of the characters in *The Misanthrope*. The other plays of this author are marked by the same strong and forcible painting, which approaches more to the satire of Jonson, than to the ease of Vanburgh, the gaiety of Farquhar, or the wit of Congreve. Joining, however, the various merits of these authors, as belonging to this period, they form a galaxy of comic talent, scarcely to be matched in any other age or country; and which is only obscured by those foul and impure mists, which their pens, like the raven wings of Sycorax, had brushed from fern and bog.

Morals repeatedly insulted, long demanded an avenger; and he arose in the person of Jeremy Collier. It is no disgrace to the memory of this virtuous and well-meaning man, that, to use the lawyer's phrase, he pleaded his cause too high; summoned, unnecessarily, to his aid the artillery with which the Christian fathers had fulminated against the Heathen Drama; and, pushing his arguments to extremity, directed it as well against the use as the abuse of the stage. Those who attempted to reply to him, availed themselves, indeed, of the weak parts of his arguments; but, upon the main points of impeachment, the poets stood self-convicted. Dryden made a manly and liberal submission, though not without some reflections upon the rudeness of his antagonist's attacks: "I shall say the less of Mr. Collier, because in many things he has taxed me justly; and I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and expressions of mine, which can be truly accused of obscenity, profaneness, or immo-

rality, and retract them. If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no occasion to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentance. It becomes me not to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause, when I have so often drawn it for a good one. Yet, it were not difficult to prove, that, in many places, he has perverted my meaning by his glosses, and interpreted my words into blasphemy and bawdry, of which they were not guilty; besides, that he is too much given to horse-play in his raillery, and comes to battle like a dictator from the plough. I will not say, 'The zeal of God's house has eaten him up;' but, I am sure, it has devoured some part of his good-manners and civility."—Congreve, less prudent, made an angry and petulant defence, yet tacitly admitted the charge brought against him, by retrenching, in the future editions of his plays, passages of grossness and profaneness, which the restless antiquary still detects in the early copies. And, on the whole, Collier's satire was attended with such salutary effects, that men started at the mass of impudence and filth, which had been gradually accumulated in the theatre, during the last reigns; and if the Augean stable was not sufficiently cleansed, the stream of public opinion was fairly directed against its conglomerated impurities. Since that period, indecency, that easy substitute for wit and pleasantry, has been gradually banished from the Drama, where the conversation is now (according to Sheridan) at least always moral, if not entertaining.

During the second period of the British Drama, great improvement was made in point of art. The principles of dramatic composition were more completely understood, and the poets themselves had written so much upon the subject, that, as Dryden somewhere complains, they had taught their audience the art of criticising their performances. They did not, however, so far surrender the liberties and immunities of their predecessors, as to receive laws from the French critics. The rules of the unities were no further adopted by Otway, Congreve, and the writers of their time, than their immediate purpose admitted. It was allowed, on all hands,

that unnecessary and gross irregularities were to be avoided, but no precise rule was adopted; poets argued upon the subject according to caprice, and acted according to convenience. Gross and palpable extensions of time, and frequent changes of place, were avoided; and, unless in tragi-comedies, authors studied to combine the intrigue of their play into one distinct and progressive action. The genius by which this art was supported, was neither so general nor so profuse as that which decorated the preceding period. It was enough, however, to support the honour of the Drama; and if the second period has produced fewer masterpieces of talent, it has exhibited more plays capable of being acted.

III. In the third period of dramatic history, the critics began to obtain an authority for which they had long struggled, and which might have proved fatal to the liberties of the stage. It is the great danger of criticism, when laying down abstract rules without reference to any example, that these regulations can only apply to the form, and never to the essence of the Drama. They may assume, that the plot must be formed on a certain model, but they cannot teach the spirit which is to animate its progress. They cannot show how a passion should be painted, but they can tell to a moment when the curtain should be dropped. The misfortune is, that, while treating of these subordinate considerations, critics exalt them to an undue importance, in their own minds and that of their scholars. What they carve out for their pupils is a mere dissection of a lifeless form; the genius which animated it escapes, as the principle of life glided from the scalpel of those anatomists who sought to detect it in the earlier days of that art. Rymer had, as early as 1688, discovered that our poetry of the last age was as rude as its architecture. "One cause thereof," he continues, "might be, that Aristotle's *Treatise of Poetry* has been so little studied amongst us; it was, perhaps, commented upon by all the great men in *Italy*, before we well knew (on this side of the Alps) that there was such a

book in being." Accordingly, Rymer endeavours to establish what he calls the Rule of Reason over Fancy, in the contrivance and economy of a play. "Those who object to this subjugation," he observes, "are mere fanatics in poetry, and will never be saved by their good works." This species of reason, however, to which Rymer appeals, resembles, in its occult nature, that which lies hidden in the depths of the municipal law, and which is better known to the common class of mankind under the name of Authority. Because Aristotle assigns Pity and Terror as the objects of tragedy, Rymer resumes the proposition, that no other source of passion can be legitimate. To this he adds some arbitrary rules, of which it would be difficult to discover the *rationale*. It was the opinion, we are told, of the ancients, "that Comedy (whose province was humour and ridiculous matter only) was to represent worse than the truth, History to describe the truth, but Tragedy was to invent things better than the truth. Like good painters, they must design their images like the life, but yet better and more beautiful than the life. The malefactor of tragedy must be a better sort of malefactor than those that live in the present age: For an obdurate, impudent, and impenitent malefactor, can neither move compassion nor terror, nor be of any imaginable use in tragedy." It would be difficult to account for these definitions upon any logical principle, and impossible for an admirer of the Drama to assent to a rule which would exclude from the stage Iago and Richard III. It is equally difficult to account for the *rationale* of the following dogmata: "If I mistake not, in poetry no woman is to kill a man, except her quality gives her the advantage above him; nor is a servant to kill his master; nor a private man, much less a subject, to kill a king, nor on the contrary. Poetical decency will not suffer death to be dealt to each other by such persons, whom the laws of duel allow not to enter the lists together." (Rymer's *View of the Tragedies of the Last Age.*) Though for these, and similar critical conceits, it would be difficult to find any just principle, nevertheless, Rymer, Dennis, and other critics, who,

mixing observations founded on sound judgment and taste, with others which rested merely upon dauntless assertion, or upon the opinions of Aristotle, began thereby to extend their authority, and produce a more than salutary influence upon the Drama. It is true, that both of the aristarchs whom we have named were so ill advised as themselves to attempt to write plays, and thereby most effectually proved, that it was possible for a Drama to be extremely regular, and, at the same time, intolerably dull. Gradually, however, their precepts, in despite of their example, gained influence over the stage. They laid down rules in which the audience were taught to regard the trade of a connoisseur as easy and soon learned; and the same quantity of technical jargon which, in the present day, constitutes a judge of painting, was, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, sufficient to elevate a Templar into a dramatic critic. The court of criticism, though self-constituted, was sufficiently formidable, since they possessed the power of executing their own decrees. Many authors made their submission; and, amongst others, Congreve humbled himself in the *Mourning Bride*, and Addison, with anxious and constitutional timidity, sacrificed to the unities in his celebrated tragedy of *Cato*. Being in form and essence rather a French than an English play, it is one of the few English tragedies which foreigners have admired. It was translated into Italian, and admired as a perfect model by Riccoboni, although his taste condemns the silly love intrigue. Its success was contagious. Southerne and Rowe may be considered as belonging to the same school; although the former admired Shakspeare, and the latter formed himself, in some degree, on the model of Otway. Translations of French tragedies became every day more frequent; and their diction and style of dialogue was imitated upon the British stage. The language of tragedy no longer expressed human passion, or intimated what the persons of the Drama actually felt, but described and debated, alternately, what they ought to feel; and sounding sentences, and long similes, exhibiting an active fancy and a cold imagination, supplied at once the place of force and of pathos.

The line between comedy and tragedy was now strictly drawn. The latter was no longer permitted to show that strain of heroic humour which exhibits itself in the character of Falconbridge, Hotspur, and Henry V., as well as Mercutio. All was to be cold and solemn, and in the same key of dull, grave state. Neither was comedy relieved by the touches of pathetic tenderness, and even sublimity, which are to be found in the romantic plays of the earlier period. To compensate the audience for the want of this beautiful variety of passion and feeling, Southerne, as Otway had done before him, usually introduces a few scenes of an under-plot, containing the most wretched and indecent farce, which was so slightly and awkwardly dovetailed into the original tragedy, that they have since been cancelled as impertinent intrusions, without being so much as missed. Young, Thomson, and others, who followed the same wordy and declamatory system of composition, contributed rather to sink than to exalt the character of the stage. The two first were both men of excellent genius, as their other writings have sufficiently testified; but, as dramatists, they wrought upon a false model, and their productions are of little value.

It is a remarkable instance of the decay of dramatic art at this period, that several of the principal authors of the time felt themselves at liberty to write imitations of old plays belonging to the original school, by way of adapting them to the taste of their own age. *The Fair Penitent* of Rowe is well known as a poor imitation of Massinger's *Fatal Dowry.* It does not greatly excel the original in the management and conduct of the piece; and, in everything else, falls as far beneath it as the baldest translation can sink below the most spirited original.

It would appear that the players of this period had adopted a mode of acting correspondent to the poetical taste of the time. Declamation seems to have been more in fashion in the school of Booth and Betterton than that vivacity of action which exhibits at once, with word, eye, and gesture, the immediate passion which it is the actor's part to express. "I cannot

help," says Cibber, "in regard to truth, remembering the rude and riotous havock we made of all the late dramatic honours of the theatre! all became at once the spoil of ignorance and self-conceit! Shakspeare was defaced, and tortured in every signal character; *Hamlet* and *Othello* lost, in one hour, all their good sense, their dignity, and fame; *Brutus* and *Cassius* became noisy blusterers, with bold unmeaning eyes, mistaken sentiments, and turgid elocution!"—(Cibber's *Memoirs.*)

A singular attempt to deviate from the prevailing taste in tragedy was made by Lillo, with the highly laudable purpose of enlarging the sphere of dramatic utility. He conceived that plays founded upon incidents of private life, might carry more immediate conviction to the mind of the hearers, and be the means of stifling more vices in the bud, than those founded on the more remote and grander events of history. Accordingly, he formed his plots from domestic crimes, and his characters never rose above the ranks of middle life. Lillo had many requisites for a tragedian; he understood, either from innate taste, or critical study, the advantage to be derived from a consistent fable; and, in the tragedy of the *Fatal Curiosity*, he has left the model of a plot, in which, without the help of any exterior circumstances, a train of events operating upon the characters of the dramatic persons, produce a conclusion at once the most dramatic and the most horrible that the imagination can conceive. Neither does it appear that, as a poet, Lillo was at all inferior to others of his age. He possessed a beautiful fancy; and much of his dialogue is as forcibly expressed as it is well conceived. On some occasions, however, he sinks below his subject; and on others, he appears to be dragged down to the nether sphere in which it is laid, and to become cold and creeping, as if depressed with the consciousness that he was writing upon a mean subject. In *George Barnwell* his apprentice-hero never rises above an idle and profligate lad; Milwood's attractions are not beyond those of a very vulgar woman of the town; Thoroughgood, as his name expresses, is very

worthy and very tiresome; and there is, positively, nothing to redeem the piece, excepting the interest arising from a tale of horror, and the supposed usefulness of the moral. The *Fatal Curiosity* is a play of a very different cast, and such as might have shaken the Grecian stage, even during the reign of terror. But the powers of the poet prove unequal to the concluding horrors of his scene. Old Wilmot's character, as the needy man who had known better days, exhibits a mind naturally good, but prepared for acting evil, even by the evil which he has himself suffered, and opens in a manner which excites the highest interest and expectation. But Lillo was unable to sustain the character to the close. After discovering himself to be the murderer of his son, the old man falls into the common cant of the theatre; he talks about computing sands, increasing the noise of thunder, adding water to the sea, and fire to Etna, by way of describing the excess of his horror and remorse; and becomes as dully desperate, or as desperately dull, as any other despairing hero in the last scene of a fifth act.

During this third period of the Drama, Comedy underwent several changes. The department called genteel comedy, where the persons as well as the foibles ridiculed, were derived chiefly from high life, assumed a separate and distinct existence from that which ransacked human nature at large for its subject. Like the tragedy of the period, this particular species of comedy was borrowed from the French. It was pleasing to the higher classes, because it lay within their own immediate circle, and turned upon the topics of gallantry, persiflage, affectation, and raillery. It was agreeable to the general audience, who imagined they were thereby admitted into the presence of their betters, and enjoyed their amusement at their expense. The *Careless Husband* of Cibber is, perhaps, the best English play on this model. The general fault to which they are all liable, is their tendency to lower the tone of moral feeling; and to familiarize men, in the middling, with the cold, heartless, and selfish system of profligate gallantry practised among the higher ranks.

We are inclined to believe, that in a moral point of view, genteel comedy, as it has been usually written, is more prejudicial to public morals than plays, the tendency of which seems at first more grossly vicious. It is not so probable that the *Beggar's Opera* has sent any one from the two-shilling gallery to the highway, as that a youth entering upon the world, and hesitating between good and evil, may be determined to the worse course, by the gay and seductive example of *Lovemore* or *Sir Charles Easy*. At any rate, the tenderness with which vices are shaded off into foibles, familiarizes them to the mind of the hearer, and gives a false colouring to those crimes which should be placed before the mind in their native deformity. But the heaviness of this class of plays, and the difficulty of finding adequate representatives for those characters which are really well drawn, are powerful antidotes to the evil which we complain of. That which is dully written, and awkwardly performed, will not find many imitators.

The genteel comedy, being a plant of foreign growth, never obtained exclusive possession of the English stage, any more than court dresses have been adopted in our private societies. The comedy of intrigue, borrowed, perhaps, originally from the Spaniards, continued to be written and acted with success. Many of Cibber's pieces, of Centlivre's, and others, still retain their place on the stage. This is a species of comedy easily written, and seen with pleasure, though consisting chiefly of bustle and complicated incident; and requiring much co-operation of the dress-maker, scene-painter, and carpenter. After all the bustle, however, of surprise, and disguise, and squabble; after every trick is exhausted, and every stratagem played off, the writer too often finds himself in a labyrinth, from which a natural mode of extrication seems altogether impossible. Hence the intrigue is huddled up at random; and the persons of the Drama seem, as if by common consent, to abandon their dramatic character before throwing off their stage-dresses. The miser becomes generous; the peevish cynic good-humoured; the libertine virtuous; the coquette is reformed; the debauchee is reclaimed;

all vices natural and habitual are abandoned by those most habitually addicted to them:—a marvellous reformation, which is brought about entirely from the consideration that the play must now be concluded. It was when pressed by this difficulty, that Fielding is said to have damned all fifth acts.

The eighteenth century, besides genteel comedy, and comedy of intrigue, gave rise to a new species of dramatic amusement. The Italian Opera had been introduced into this country at a great expense, and to the prejudice, as it was supposed, of the legitimate Drama. Gay, in aiming at nothing beyond a parody of this fashionable entertainment, making it the vehicle of some political satire against Sir Robert Walpole's administration, unwittingly laid the foundation of the English Opera. The popularity of his piece was unequalled; partly owing to its peculiar humour, partly to its novelty, partly to the success of the popular airs, which every body heard with delight, and partly to political motives. The moral tendency of *The Beggar's Opera* has been much questioned; although, in all probability, the number of highwaymen is not more increased by the example of Macheath, than that of murderers is diminished by the catastrophe of George Barnwell. Many years ago, however, an unhappy person, rather from a perverted and misplaced ambition, than from the usual motives of want and desperation, chose, though in easy circumstances, and most respectably connected, to place himself at the head of a band of thieves and housebreakers; whose depredations he directed and shared. On the night on which they committed the crime for which he suffered, and when they were equipped for the expedition, he sung to his accomplices the chorus of *The Beggar's Opera*,—"Let us take the road." But his confederates, professional thieves, and who pursued, from habit and education, the desperate practices which Mr. B—— adopted from an adventurous spirit of profligate Quixotry, knew nothing at all of Gay, or *The Beggar's Opera*; and in their several confessions and testimonies, only remembered something of a *flash-song*, about "turning lead to gold." This curious circum-

stance, while it tends to show that the Drama may affect the weak part of a mind, predisposed to evil by a diseased imagination, proves the general truth of what Johnson asserts in *The Life of Gay*, that "highwaymen and housebreakers seldom mingle in any elegant diversions; nor is it possible for any one to imagine, that he may rob with safety, because he sees Macheath reprieved on the stage."

This play is now chiefly remarkable, as having given rise to the English Opera. In this pleasing entertainment, it is understood that the plot may be light and the characters superficial, provided that the music be good, and adapted to the situation, the scenes lively and possessed of comic force. Notwithstanding the subordinate nature of this species of composition, it approaches, perhaps, more closely to the ancient Grecian Drama than any thing which retains possession of our stage. The subjects, indeed, are as totally different as the sublime from the light and the trivial. But, in the mixture of poetry and music, and in the frequent introduction of singing-characters unconnected with the business of the piece, and therefore somewhat allied to the Chorus, the English Opera has some general points of resemblance with the Grecian tragedy. This species of dramatic writing was successfully practised by Bickerstaff, and has been honoured by the labours of Sheridan.

IV. With the fourth era of our dramatic history commenced a return to a better taste, introduced by the celebrated David Garrick. The imitations of French tragedy, and the tiresome uniformity of genteel comedy, were ill adapted to the display of his inimitable talent. And thus, if the last generation reaped many hours of high enjoyment from the performances of this great actor, the present is indebted to him for having led back the public taste to the Dramas of Shakspeare.

The plays of this great author had been altogether forgotten, or so much marred and disguised by interpolations and alterations, that he seems to have arisen on

the British stage with the dignity of an antique statue disencumbered from the rubbish in which it had been enveloped since the decay of the art. But, although Garrick showed the world how the characters of Shakspeare might be acted, and so far paved the way for a future regeneration of the stage, no kindred spirit arose to imitate his tone of composition. His supremacy was universally acknowledged; but it seemed as if he was regarded as an object of adoration, not of imitation; and that authors were as much interdicted the treading his tragic path, as the entering his magic circle. It was not sufficiently remembered that the faults of Shakspeare, or rather of his age, are those into which no modern dramatist is likely to fall; and that he learned his beauties in the school of nature, which is ever open to all who profess the fine arts. Shakspeare may, indeed, be inimitable, but there are inferior degrees of excellence, which talent and study cannot fail to attain; and the statuary were much to blame who, in despair of modelling a Venus like that of Phidias, should set himself to imitate a Chinese doll. Yet such was the conduct of the dramatists of Britain long after the supremacy of Shakspeare had been acknowledged. He reigned a Grecian prince over Persian slaves; and they who adored him did not dare attempt to use his language. The tragic muse appeared to linger behind the taste of the age, and still used the constrained and mincing measure which she had been taught in the French school. Hughes, Cumberland, and other men of talent, appeared in her service; but their model remained as imperfect as ever; and it was not till our own time that any bold efforts were made to restore to tragedy that truth and passion, without which, declamation is only rant and impertinence. Horace Walpole, however, showed what might be done by adopting a more manly and vigorous style of composition; and Home displayed the success of a more natural current of passion. The former choosing a theme not only totally unfit for representation, but from which the mind shrinks in private study, treated it as a man of genius, free from the trammels of habit

and of pedantry. His characters in *The Mysterious Mother* do not belong to general classes, but have bold, true, and individual features; and the language approaches that of the first age of the English Drama. The *Douglas* of Home is not recommended by this species of merit. In diction and character it does not rise above other productions of the period. But the interest turns upon a passion which finds a response in every bosom; for those who are too old for love, and too young for ambition, are all alike awake to the warmth and purity of maternal and filial affection. The scene of the recognition of Douglas's birth possesses a power over the affections, which, when supported by adequate representation, is scarce equalled in the circle of our Drama. It is remarkable that the ingenious author was so partial to this theatrical situation, as to introduce it in several of his other tragedies.

The comedy of the fourth period is chiefly remarkable for exhibiting *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*. Critics prefer the latter; while the general audience reap, perhaps, more pleasure from the former; the pleasantry being of a more general cast, the incidents more complicated and varied, and the whole plot more interesting. In both these plays, the gentlemanlike ease of Farquhar is united with the wit of Congreve. Indeed, the wit of Sheridan, though equally brilliant with that of his celebrated predecessor, flows so easily, and is so happily elicited by the tone of the dialogue, that in admiring its sparkles, we never once observe the stroke of the flint which produces them. Wit and pleasantry seemed to be the natural atmosphere of this extraordinary man, whose history was at once so brilliant and so melancholy. Goldsmith was, perhaps, in relation to Sheridan, what Vanburgh was to Congreve. His comedies turn on an extravagance of intrigue and disguise, and so far belong to the Spanish school. But the ease of his humorous dialogue, and the droll, yet true conception of the characters, made sufficient amends for an occasional stretch in point of probability. If all who draw on the spectators for indulgence, were equally prepared to compensate by a corresponding degree

of pleasure, they would have little occasion to complain. The elder Colman's *Jealous Wife*, and some of his smaller pieces, are worthy, and it is no ordinary compliment, of being placed beside these masterpieces. We dare not rank Cumberland so high, although two or three of his numerous efforts retain possession of the stage. *The Wheel of Fortune* was certainly one of the best acting plays of its time; but it was perhaps chiefly on account of the admirable representative which the principal character found in Mr. John Kemble.

The plays of Foote, the modern Aristophanes, who ventured, by his powers of mimicking the mind as well as the external habits, to bring living persons on the stage, belong to this period, and make a remarkable part of its dramatic history. But we need not dwell upon it. Foote was an unprincipled satirist; and while he affected to be the terror of vice and folly, was only anxious to extort forbearance-money from the timid, or to fill his theatre at the indiscriminate expense of friends and enemies, virtuous or vicious, who presented foibles capable of being turned into ridicule. It is a just punishment of this course of writing, that Foote's plays, though abounding in comic and humorous dialogue, have died with the parties whom he ridiculed. When they lost the zest of personality, their popularity, in spite of much intrinsic merit, fell into utter decay.

Meantime dramatic composition of the higher class seemed declining. Garrick, in our fathers' time, Mrs. Siddons in ours, could neither of them extract from their literary admirers any spark of congenial fire. No part written for either of these astonishing performers has survived the transient popularity which their talents could give to almost anything. The truth seems to be, that the French model had been wrought upon till it was altogether worn out; and a new impulse from some other quarter—a fresh turning up of the soil, and awakening of its latent energies by a new mode of culture, was become absolutely necessary to the renovation of our dramatic literature. England was destined to receive this impulse from Germany, where literature was in the first luxuriant glow of vegetation,

with all its crop of flowers and weeds rushing up together. There was good and evil in the importation derived from this superabundant source. But the evil was of a nature so contrary to that which had long palsied our dramatic literature, that, like the hot poison mingling with the cold, it may in the issue bring us nearer to a state of health.

The affectation of Frederic II. of Prussia, and of other German princes, for a time suppressed the native literature, and borrowed their men of letters from France, as well as their hair-dressers,—their Dramas as well as their dressed dishes. The continental courts, therefore, had no share in forming the national Drama. To the highest circle in every nation, that of France will be most acceptable, not only on account of its strict propriety and conformity to *les convenances*, but also as securing them against the risk of hearing bold and offensive truths uttered in the presence of the sovereign and the subject. But the bold, frank, cordial, and rough character of the German people at large, did not relish the style of the French tragedies translated for their stage; and this cannot be wondered it, when the wide difference between the nations is considered.

The national character of the Germans is diametrically opposite to that of the French. The latter are light almost to frivolity, quick in seeing points of ridicule, slowly awakened to those of feeling. The Germans are of an abstracted, grave, and somewhat heavy temper; less alive to the ridiculous, more easily moved by an appeal to the passions. That which moves a Frenchman to laughter, affects a German with sorrow or indignation; and in that which touches the German as a source of the sublime or pathetic, the quick-witted Frenchman sees only subject of laughter. In their theatres the Frenchman comes to judge, to exercise his critical faculties, and to apply the rules which he has learned, fundamentally or by rote, to the performance of the night. A German, on the contrary, expects to receive that violent excitation which is most pleasing to his imaginative and somewhat phlegmatic character. While the Frenchman judges of the form and shape of

the play, the observance of the unities, and the denouement of the plot, the German demands the powerful contrast of character and passion,—the sublime in tragedy and the grotesque in comedy. The former may be called the formalist of dramatic criticism, keeping his eye chiefly on its exterior shape and regular form; the latter is the fanatic, who, disregarding forms, requires a deep and powerful tone of passion and of sentiment, and is often content to surrender his feelings to inadequate motives.

From the different temper of the nations, the merits and faults of their national theatres became diametrically opposed to each other. The French author is obliged to confine himself, as we have already observed, within the circle long since described by Aristotle. He must attend to all the decorum of the scene, and conform to every regulation, whether rational or arbitrary, which has been entailed on the stage since the days of Corneille. He must never so far yield to feeling, as to lose sight of grace and dignity. He must never venture so far in quest of the sublime, as to run the risk of moving the risible faculties of an audience, so much alive to the ludicrous, that they will often find or make it in what is to others the source of the grand or the terrible. The Germans, on the contrary, have never subjected their poets to any arbitrary forms. The division of the empire into so many independent states, has prevented the ascendancy of any general system of criticism; and their national literature was not much cultivated, until the time when such authority had become generally unpopular. Lessing had attacked the whole French theatrical system in his *Dramaturgie*, with the most bitter raillery. Schiller brought forward his splendid Dramas of Romance and of History. Goethe crowded the stage with the heroes of ancient German chivalry. No means of exciting emotion were condemned as irregular, providing emotion were actually excited. And there can be no doubt that the license thus given to the poet,—the willingness with which the audience submitted to the most extravagant postulates on their part, left them at liberty to exert the full efforts of their genius.

Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe, became at once the fathers and the masters of the German theatre; and it must be objected to these great men, that, in the abundance of their dramatic talent, they sometimes forgot that their pieces, in order to be acted, must be adapted to the capabilities of a theatre; and thus wrote plays altogether incapable of being represented. Their writings, although affording many high examples of poetry and passion, are marked with faults which the exaggeration of their followers has often carried into total extravagance. The plays of Chivalry and of History were followed by an inundation of imitations, in which, according to Schlegel, "there was nothing historical but the names and external circumstances; nothing chivalrous but the helmets, bucklers, and swords; and nothing of old German honesty but the supposed rudeness. The sentiments were as modern as they were vulgar; from chivalry pieces, they were converted into cavalry plays, which certainly deserve to be acted by horses rather than men." (Schlegel *on the Drama.*)

It is not the extravagance of the apparatus alone, but exaggeration of character and sentiment, which have been justly ascribed as faults to the German school. The authors appear to have introduced too harshly, brilliant lights and deep shadows; the tumid is too often substituted for the sublime; and faculties and dispositions the most opposed to each other, are sometimes described as existing in the same person.

In German comedy the same faults predominate to a greater degree. The pathetic comedy, which might be rather called domestic tragedy, became, unfortunately, very popular in Germany; and found a champion in Kotzebue, who carried its conquests over all the continent. The most obvious fault of this species of composition is, the demoralizing falsehood of the pictures which it offers to us. The vicious are frequently presented as objects less of censure than of sympathy; sometimes they are selected as objects of imitation and praise. There is an affectation of attributing noble and virtuous sentiments, to the persons least qualified by habit or education to entertain them; and of describing

the higher and better educated classes, as uniformly deficient in those feelings of liberality, generosity, and honour, which may be considered as proper to their situation in life. This contrast may be true in particular instances, and, being used sparingly, might afford a good moral lesson; but in spite of truth and probability it has been assumed, upon all occasions, by these authors, as the ground-work of a sort of intellectual jacobinism; consisting, as Mr. Coleridge has well expressed it, "in the confusion and subversion of the natural order of things, their causes and their effects; in the excitement of surprise, by representing the qualities of liberality, refined feeling, and a nice sense of honour, in persons and in classes of life where experience teaches us least to expect them; and in rewarding with all the sympathies that are the dues of virtue, those criminals, whom law, reason, and religion, have excommunicated from our esteem."

The German taste was introduced upon the English theatre within these twenty years. But the better productions of her stage have never been made known to us; for, by some unfortunate chance, the wretched pieces of Kotzebue have found a readier acceptance, or more willing translators, than the sublimity of Goethe, the romantic strength of Schiller, or the deep tragic pathos of Lessing. They have tended, however, (wretched as the model is,) to introduce on our stage a degree of sentiment, and awaken among the audience a strain of sensibility, to which before we were strangers.

George Colman's comedy of *John Bull* is by far the best effort of our late comic Drama. The scenes of broad humour are executed in the best possible taste; and the whimsical, yet native characters, reflect the manners of real life. The sentimental parts, although one of them includes a finely wrought-up scene of paternal distress, partake of the *falsetto* of German pathos. But the piece is both humorous and affecting; and we readily excuse its obvious imperfections, in consideration of its exciting our laughter and our tears.

While the British stage received a new impulse from a country whose literature had hitherto scarce been

known to exist, she was enriched by productions of the richest native genius. A retired female, thinking and writing in solitude, presented to her countrymen the means of regaining the true and manly tone of national tragedy. She has traced its foundation to that strong instinctive and sympathetic curiosity, which tempts men to look into the bosoms of their fellow creatures, and to seek, in the distresses or emotions of others, the parallel of their own passions. She has built on the foundations which she laid bare, and illustrated her precepts by examples, which will long be an honour to the age in which they were produced, and admired;—yet its disgrace, when it is considered that they have been barred their legitimate sphere of influence upon the public taste.

Besides this gifted person, the names of Coleridge, of Maturin, and other men of talents, throng upon our recollection; and there is one who, to judge from the dramatic sketch he has given us in *Manfred*, must be considered as a match for Æschylus, even in his sublimest moods of horror. It is no part of our plan, however, to enter upon the criticism of our contemporaries. Suffice it to say, that the age has no reason to apprehend any decay of dramatic talent.

Neither can our actors be supposed inadequate to the representation of such pieces of dramatic art, as we judge our authors capable of producing. We have lost Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble, but we still possess Kean, Young, and Miss O'Neil;* and the stage has to boast other tragic performers of merit. In comedy, perhaps, it was never more strong. In point of scenery and decoration, our theatres are so amply provided, that they may rather seem to exceed than to fall short of what is required to form a classical exhibition.

Where, then, are we to look for that unfortunate counterbalance, which confessedly depresses the national Drama in despite of the advantages we have enume-

* Since the publication of the work in which this essay originally appeared, Miss O'Neil has exchanged the honours of public, for the happiness of private life; having been married for some years to Mr. Wrixon Becher, M. P.

rated? We apprehend it will be found in the monopoly possessed by two large establishments, which, unhappily for the progress of national taste, and, it is said, without any equivalent advantage to the proprietors, now enjoy the exclusive privilege of dramatic representation. It must be distinctly understood, that we attribute these disadvantages to the *system* itself, and by no means charge them upon those who have the administration of either theatre. The proprietors have a right to enjoy what the law invests in them; and the managers have probably discharged their duty to the public as honourably as circumstances would admit of; but the system has led into errors which affect public taste, and even public morals. We shall briefly consider it as it influences, 1*st*, the mode of representation; 2*dly*, the theatrical authors and performers; and, 3*dly*, the quality and composition of the audience.

The *first* inconvenience arises from the great size of the theatres, which has rendered them unfit for the legitimate purposes of the Drama. The persons of the performers are, in these huge circles, so much diminished, that nothing short of the mask and buskin could render them distinctly visible to the audience. Show and machinery have, therefore, usurped the place of tragic poetry; and the author is compelled to address himself to the eyes, not to the understanding or feelings of the spectators. This is of itself a gross error. Everything beyond correct costume and theatrical decorum is foreign to the legitimate purposes of the Drama, as tending to divide the attention of the audience; and the rivalry of the scene-painter and the carpenter cannot be very flattering to any author or actor of genius. Besides, all attempts at decoration, beyond what the decorum of the piece requires, must end in paltry puppet-show exhibition. The talents of the scene-painter and mechanist cannot, owing to the very nature of the stage, make battles, sieges, &c. anything but objects of ridicule. Thus we have enlarged our theatres, so as to destroy the effect of acting, without carrying to any perfection that of pantomime and dumb show.

Secondly, The monopoly of the two large theatres has

operated unfavourably both upon theatrical writers and performers. The former have been, in many instances, if not absolutely excluded from the scene, yet deterred from approaching it, in the same manner as men avoid attempting to pass through a narrow wicket, which is perpetually thronged by an importunate crowd. Allowing the managers of these two theatres, judging in the first and in the last resort, to be possessed of the full discrimination necessary to a task so difficult—supposing them to be at all times alike free from partiality and from prejudice—still the number of plays thrust upon their hands must prevent their doing equal justice to all; and must frequently deter a man of real talents, either from pride or modesty, from entering a competition, clogged with delay, solicitation, and other circumstances, "*haud subeunda ingenio suo.*" It is unnecessary to add, that increasing the number of theatres, and diminishing their size, would naturally tend to excite a competition among the managers, whose interest it is to make experiments on the public taste; and that this would infallibly secure any piece, of reasonable promise, a fair opportunity of being represented. It is by such a competition that genius is discovered; it is thus that horticulturists raise whole beds of common flowers, for the chance of finding among them one of those rare varieties which are the boast of their art.

The exclusive privilege of the regular London theatres is equally, or in a greater degree, detrimental to the performer; for it is with difficulty that he fights his way to a London engagement, and when once received, he is too often retained for the mere purpose of being laid aside, or *shelfed*, as it is technically called;—rendered, that is, a weekly burden upon the pay-list of the theatre, without being produced above four or five times in the season to exhibit his talents. Into this system the managers are forced from the necessity of their situation, which compels them to enlist in their service every performer who seems to possess buds of genius, although it ends in their being so crowded together that they have no room to blossom. In fact, many a man of talent thus brought from the active exercise of a profession, in which excel-

lence can only arise from practice, to be paid for remaining obscure and inactive in London, and supported by what seems little short of eleemosynary bounty, either becomes careless of his business or disgusted with it; and, in either case, stagnates in that mediocrity to which want of exercise alone will often condemn natural genius.

Thirdly, and especially, the magnitude of these theatres has occasioned them to be destined to company so scandalous, that persons not very nice in their taste of society, must yet exclaim against the abuse as a national nuisance. We are aware of the impossibility of excluding a certain description of females from public places in a corrupted metropolis like London; but in theatres of moderate size, frequented by the latter class, these unfortunate persons would feel themselves compelled to wear a mask at least of decency. In the present theatres of London, the best part of the house is openly and avowedly set off for their reception; and no part of it which is open to the public at large is free from their intrusion, or at least from the open display of the disgusting improprieties to which their neighbourhood gives rise. And these houses, raised at an immense expense, are so ingeniously misconstructed, that, in the private boxes, you see too little of the play, and, in the public boxes, greatly too much of a certain description of the company. No man of delicacy would wish the female part of his family to be exposed to such scenes; no man of sense would wish to put youth, of the male sex, in the way of such temptation. This evil, if not altogether arising from the large size of the theatres, has been so incalculably increased by it, that, unless in the case of strong attraction upon the stage, prostitutes and their admirers usually form the principal part of the audience. We censure, and with justice, the corruption of morals in Paris. But in no public place in that metropolis is vice permitted to bear so open and audacious a front as in the theatres of London. Barefaced infamy is in foreign cities never permitted to insult decency. Those who seek it must go to the haunts to which its open disclosure is limited. In London, if we would enjoy our

most classical public amusement, we are braved by gross vice on the very threshold.

We notice these evils, without pretending to point out the remedy. If, however, it were possible so to arrange the interests concerned, that the patents of the present theatres should cover four, or even six, of smaller size, we conceive that more good actors would be found, and more good plays written; and, as a necessary consequence, that good society would attend the theatre in sufficient numbers to enforce respect to decency. The access to the stage would be rendered easy to both authors and actors; and although this might give scope to some rant, and false taste, it could not fail to call forth much excellence, that must otherwise remain latent or repressed. The theatres would be relieved of the heavy expense at present incurred, in paying performers who do not play; and in maintaining, as both Drury-Lane and Covent Garden do at present, three theatrical corps, for the separate purposes of tragedy, comedy, and musical pieces; only one of which can be productive labourers on the same evening, though all must be supported and paid. According to our more thrifty plan, each of these companies would be earning at the same time the fruits of their professional industry, and a due profit to the house they belong to. The hours of representation, in one or more of these theatres, might be rendered more convenient to those in high life, while the middling classes might enjoy a rational and classical entertainment after the business of the day.

Such an arrangement might, indeed, be objected to, by those who entertain a holy horror of the very name of a theatre; and who imagine impiety and blasphemy are inseparable from the Drama. We have no room left to argue with such persons; or we might endeavour to prove, that the dramatic art is in itself as capable of being directed either to right or wrong purposes, as the art of printing. It is true, that even after a play has been formed upon the most virtuous model, the man who is engaged in the duties of religion will be better employed than he who is seated in a theatre, and listening to the performance. To those abstracted and enrapt spirits,

who feel, or suppose they feel, themselves capable of remaining constantly involved in heavenly thoughts, any sublunary amusement may justly seem frivolous. But the mass of mankind are not so framed. The Supreme Being, who claimed the seventh day as his own, allotted the other six days of the week for purposes merely human. When the necessity of daily labour is removed, and the call of social duty fulfilled, that of moderate and timely amusement claims its place, as a want inherent in our nature. To relieve this want, and fill up the mental vacancy, games are devised, books are written, music is composed, spectacles and plays are invented and exhibited. And if these last have a moral and virtuous tendency; if the sentiments expressed are calculated to rouse our love of what is noble, and our contempt of what is base or mean; if they unite hundreds in a sympathetic admiration of virtue, abhorrence of vice, or derision of folly; it will remain to be shown how far the spectator is more criminally engaged, than if he had passed the evening in the idle gossip of society; in the feverish pursuits of ambition; or in the unsated and insatiable struggle after gain—the graver employments of the present life, but equally unconnected with our existence hereafter.

THE END.

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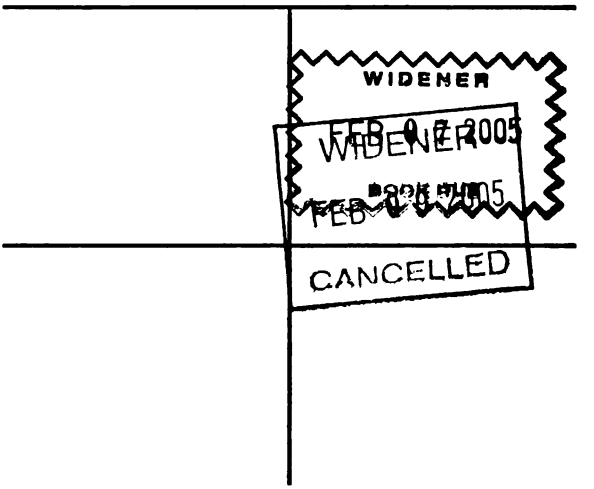
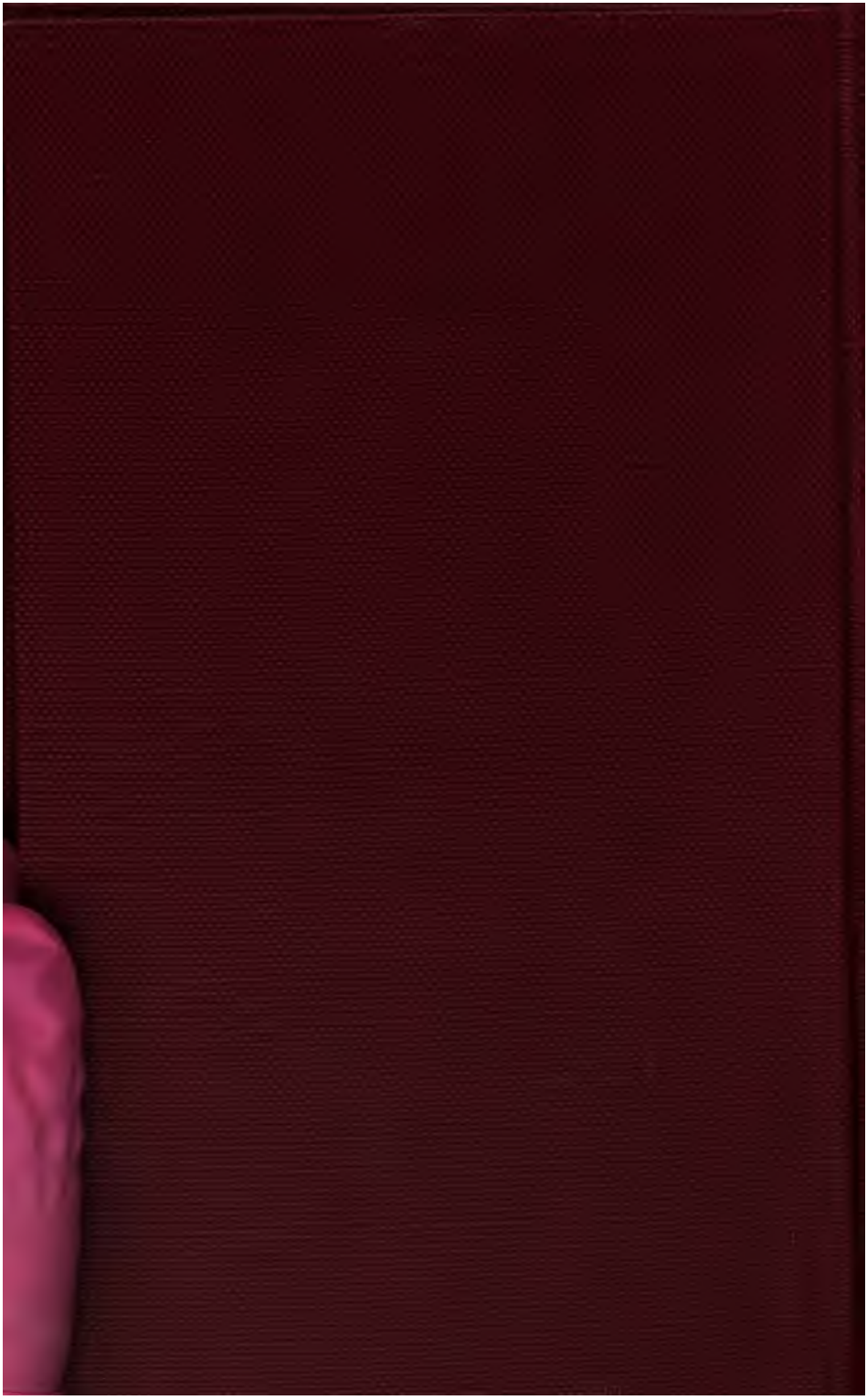
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